

**EXPLICATION OF THE MEANING OF REMINISCENCE
FOR THE ELDERLY LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY**

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The Faculty of the School of Nursing
Adelphi University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Roberta Cavendish
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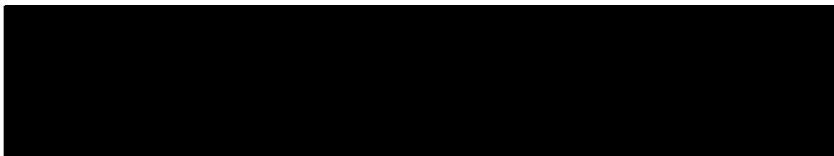
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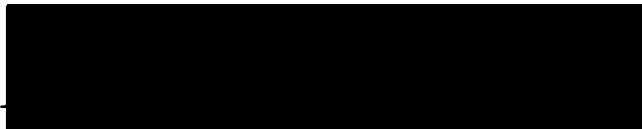
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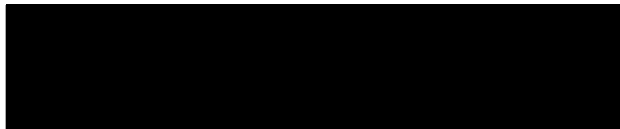
We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend acceptance of this dissertation.



Pierre Woog, Ph.D. ^l
Dissertation Chairperson & Professor



Dorothea Hays, Ed.D., RN
Professor
Committee member



Carol Lamanno
Professor
Committee member

This dissertation is accepted by the School of Nursing,
Adelphi University

Abstract

Explication of the Meaning of Reminiscence for the Elderly Living in the Community

Roberta Cavendish

Human beings have the distinct capacity to reminisce. Reminiscence is a function of memory and memories are autobiographical. Studying memory expanded an understanding of the phenomenon. Although reminiscence occurs in all age groups, special significance has been attributed to its meaning in this population. This area has yet to be studied.

Using a semi-structured interview technique, eight participants, six females and two males were asked to describe reminiscing. The data were analyzed using a qualitative methodology. The findings indicated that when reminiscences are narrated in a storytelling style of presentation, they provide a medium for examining the life trajectory. Narratives provided the essence of the participants' life story fabric and a link for the interrelatedness of the theoretical categories that emerged.

In the theoretical category, Life-Story-Trajectory, the participants' life story styles of

presentation were categorized into those of Affirmer, Negater and Despairer using Fallot's (1976) descriptions. The participants' reminiscences validated Fallot's styles. Personal attributes identified in reminiscences may add to his descriptions. The Affirmers had qualities congruent with the achievement of ego-integrity and adaption as indicated in their reminiscences.

Based on the concept of the Novum described by Straus (1966), the theoretical category, Narratives of the-Novum emerged. Novum events of life-gain, life-loss and life-stage change were identified. How these novum events were resolved impacted on the reminiscences. Other conceptual categories derived from the data included a Leaving-of-Legacies which were the participants' meaningful contributions to future generations, including personal properties, values and a lifetime of memories, and A Making-of-Spiritual-Links including church connections, personal beliefs which comprised the inner resources for dealing with life episodes, and ministering missions which provided for a sense of connectedness.

In reminiscence, the reflection is holographic. The self is seen as an entity of life experiences. Meaning is attached to the reminiscence based on how the past is assimilated. The findings support narrative as a tool for qualitative inquiry.

DEDICATION

To

Assunta, Agnes, and Ada

The life given us by

Nature is short;

but the memory of a

Well-spent life is eternal

Christopher Halloway

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For many, the completion of the dissertation marks the end of graduate studies. I see it as the beginning of a new stage of life with many new challenges, and commitments to nursing, to the elderly living in the community and to society. I accept the challenges.

I sincerely want to thank all who helped me achieve my goal.

My esteemed committee:

Pierre Woog, Ph.D., Chair

Dorothea Hays, Ed.D.

Carol Lamanno, Ph.D.

Readers: Dr. Sally Ridgeway

Dr. Catherine Windwer

I wish to express my deepest appreciation and sincere thanks to the participants. Their trust in me and their willingness to share their private reminiscences will always be cherished. My deepest respect for their courage, strength and resilience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| University Acceptance | ii |
| Abstract | iii |
| Dedication | vi |
| Acknowledgements | vii |
| Table of Contents | viii |
| Chapter | |
| I. Introduction | 1 |
| Background and Purpose of the Study | 1 |
| Outline of Succeeding Chapters | 7 |
| Chapter | |
| II. Review of the Literature | 9 |
| Reminiscence: Process and Styles | 9 |
| Reminiscence: Stories and Narrative | 16 |
| Reminiscence: Significant Studies | 19 |
| Reminiscence: Memory and Meaning | 29 |
| Philosophical Perspective: Meaning as A Vital Element in Human Life | 36 |
| Reminiscence: A Search for Meaning | 40 |
| Significance of the Study | 46 |
| Chapter | |
| III. Design of the Study | 50 |
| Purpose of the Study | 50 |
| Overview of the Method | 51 |
| Statement of the Problem | 53 |
| Definition of Terms | 54 |
| Assumptions | 56 |
| Limitations | 56 |
| Description of Subjects | 56 |
| Procedure for Data Collection | 57 |
| Procedure for Data Analysis | 59 |
| Reliability and Validity | 60 |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|------------|
| Chapter | | |
| IV. | Findings of the Study | 63 |
| | Data Collection | 63 |
| | Sample Characteristics | 63 |
| | Vignettes | 66 |
| | The Interview | 78 |
| | Analysis of Findings | 90 |
| | Theoretical Categories | 97 |
| | Life-Story Trajectory | 97 |
| | Narratives of the-Novum | 150 |
| | A Leaving-of-Legacies | 159 |
| | A Making-of-Spiritual-Links | 166 |
| | Discussion of Findings | 171 |
| | | |
| Chapter | | |
| V. | Summary of Findings, Conclusions, Implications, Recommendations | 198 |
| | Summary of Findings | 198 |
| | Implications for Nursing | 202 |
| | Recommendations for Further Research | 208 |
| | | |
| References | | 212 |
| | | |
| Tables | | |
| Table 1 | Sample Characteristics | 65 |
| Table 2 | The Context of Reminiscence | 93 |
| | | |
| Appendices | | |
| | Appendix A - Informed Consent | |
| | Appendix B - Demographic Data Sheet | |
| | Appendix C - Interview Probes | |

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The aging of populations is a worldwide phenomenon. In the United States, the population of persons age 65 and over grew twice as fast as all other age groups in the past twenty years and that trend will become especially pronounced shortly after the turn of the century (Barrow, 1992). More individuals in this group are considered well elderly and continue to live in the community. The measurement of health now entails looking at how well an individual copes with impairment and the extent to which life routines are maintained. Aging is a phase of growth and development, and scientific effort has helped to distinguish age related changes from changes caused by disease processes (Ebersole & Hess, 1990).

A challenge now facing nursing and other gerontological service providers is the provision of appropriate and effective support for the well elderly living at home. This can be accomplished through the adaptation of concepts of health promotion and wellness appropriate to this developmental stage of life, continued research endeavors and educational programs designed to prepare people for careers in the "aging

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network". This network refers to the complex web of services provided on local levels with guidance from state units and the federal Administration on Aging (Gelfand, 1988).

During the past six years, I have been involved in the training of gerontological professionals from diverse fields by teaching an undergraduate Gerontology course. Seminars provide an opportunity for the discussion of field work interactions. A consistently reported student observation is that the elderly tell a lot of stories about their past in daily conversations. I personally made this observation while vacationing one summer with an energetic well elderly relative. During our free flowing conversations, I listened a lot and remembered the student seminar discussions. The conversations were unique because of the occurrence of spontaneous, vivid, effortless reminiscing which seems to blend the past with the present, sharing personal interests and experiences. Most of the time these were no longer active interests because of age related changes, but they were often brought back to life by the magic of memories.

My gerontology seminars initially stimulated my curiosity about the significance of reminiscence and my

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personal experience heightened my interest. I wondered how the elderly used their past. Was it a resource in search of approval, recognition, justice or meaning in a continued quest for an integrated personality and inner peace, or not? This interest motivated my research efforts and helped shape my research question. What is the meaning of reminiscence for the well elderly?

As a result of probing through literature I found that the past two decades have seen a small but growing body of speculation, theory, and research directed toward the phenomenon of reminiscence. Different styles of reminiscence are described and a wide range of functions and diverse effects are cited. Triggering stimuli, vividness and scope, ease of retrieval, as well as active and passive components of reminiscence seem to be as diverse as the personality variables and environmental conditions involved. A majority of reminiscence studies reviewed do not address the significance of such factors as ethnic background, religion, gender, personality, economic or family characteristics and other variables that may impact on what is recalled or how memories and feelings are interpreted.

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The elderly studied varied from the employed (Pincus, 1970) to the recently institutionalized (Boylin, Gordon & Nehrke, 1976), to those imminently facing death (Babb de Ramon, 1983). Several people wrote about reminiscence in groups. Baker (1985) and Price (1983) reported successful reminiscing group programs, while Ebersole (1976) discussed the potential problems that she encountered with groups. Matteson and Munsat's (1982) group interventions enhanced the social interactions of its members, while Lappe's (1987) group interventions enhance self-esteem. Positive outcomes from others' groups included decreased denial of death (Georgemiller & Maloney, 1987), and improved cognitive function (Hughston & Merriam, 1980); however, Perrotta and Meacham's (1982) group intervention resulted in negative findings. Methodologies included single questions, elaborate questionnaires and unstructured interviews. Some studies were designed to ascertain the time orientation of conversation (Giles, 1992) while others dealt with mentation (Boden & Del Vento, 1983). Wright and Payne (1985) concluded that men and women reminisced equally. Nursing studies on reminiscence have focused on depression and the therapeutic aspects of this

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phenomenon (Burnside, 1981). Other disciplines studied the life review and its effects on the adaptation and adjustment of elderly individuals to institutionalization or, degrees of ego-integrity achieved as a result of this practice (Carlson, 1984).

Significant issues concerning reminiscence seem to be divided into two broad categories and will be reviewed. One deals with the developmental aspects of reminiscence based on Erickson's theory of development, ego-integrity versus despair; the other one deals with its adaptive qualities. The well elderly's tendency to reminisce has not been widely studied by any particular group. Only a few studies have been conducted with well elderly individuals who live in the community (Havighurst & Glasser, 1972; Mc Mahon & Rhudick, 1964; Perrota & Meacham, 1982), or with the qualitative aspects of reminiscence and memories (Butler, 1963; Job, 1983; Revere, 1971).

The above discussion identifies the relationship between the well elderly and reminiscing as an important still unexplained phenomenon for study by nursing and related disciplines in the aging network, an interdisciplinary group consisting of social workers, gerontologists, homemakers and related

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therapists. Meeting the needs of this population requires a broadening of health promotion interventions to balance the physical and psychosocial needs of the elderly and include developmental characteristics such as reminiscence. Reminiscence is seen as a natural developmental process (Maddox, 1987). Meaning has been assigned to the practice by theorists (Erickson, 1978; Revere, 1971; and Romaniuk, 1981), but the meaning the reminiscer gives it has not yet become an area of exploration.

The data for this qualitative research study were gathered from interview transcripts and related data of eight participants who met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed according to grounded theory methodology. This inductive method of theory development is especially useful in areas where little previous research has been conducted or to gain a new perspective concerning a phenomenon of study (Glasser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1966; Stern, 1980). This analytic approach should enhance the understanding of the phenomenon of reminiscence and assist in explicating the meaning of reminiscence for the well elderly who live in the community.

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Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review of the reminiscence process. It includes the relationship of reminiscence styles with narrated stories. A review of research studies significant to the study is conducted. Memory studies which provide an expanded view of reminiscence, a philosophical perspective, and reminiscence as a search for meaning are addressed. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the study's design. This includes: the research problem, purpose of the study, overview of the method, statement of the problem, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, description of subjects, procedure for data collection, data analysis, and concludes with the reliability and validity consistent with the methodology.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to a detailed explanation of the findings. The sample is described. Vignettes depict participants' characteristic responses to reminiscing. Attention is directed toward sampling procedures and the interviewing approach to describe what was done, how, and what happened as a result. Themes are synthesized. The conceptual categories that

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evolved are abstracted and illustrated. Congruent with the grounded theory method an additional literature review related to the findings is included.

Chapter 5 includes the summary of findings and conclusions, with special emphasis on implications for nursing and recommendations for continued research related to this phenomenon and population.

Extensive use has been made throughout this study of quotations taken from participants' tapes and presented in their original form and language. The personally narrated data help to provide evidence, clarify concepts, and communicate depth of thought, feeling, and meaning.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reminiscence: Process and Styles

Human beings possess a distinct capacity to reminisce, to recall a moment or moments from their past, stored in the rhythm of their consciousness within their being. Consciousness is an essential requirement for reminiscence as it implies an ever-flowing stream of perceptions, feelings, thoughts or images stored as memories from each person's life experiences. Although experiences are crystallized by memory (Neisser, 1982) producing a convincing appearance of permanence and continuity in a person's life, a person's consciousness results in the awareness, or attention, and the ability to concentrate or focus.

Allen (1931) and Neisser (1982) concluded that reminiscence is a unique phenomenon, a process in which the ego is cognizant of an experience in which the individual is for the moment especially interested that is enfolded in his or her memory. In this illuminated area, the focus of attention marks the "now" in reality. The light of the reminiscence is the "awareness", focused on the point where a new

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experience is passing in through the senses from the outer world to mesh inextricably with the unfolded memory (Allen, 1931, p. 45). Although one may reminisce about an event or experience more than once in a lifetime, the reminiscence will never be the same.

According to Romaniuk (1981) reminiscence is an abstract phenomenon. Like a multifaceted prism, the content, frequency, form, function, affect, outcome and triggering stimuli, are facets that add a uniqueness like nuances of colors to each recollection. This can explain the weight of different experiences to reminiscences as some provoke a different level of significance for the reminiscer.

The process of recall in reminiscence may be either oral or silent. It can take many forms. It can be focused or non-focused, other or self-serving, significant or insignificant, amusing or serious, general or personal (Havighurst & Glasser, 1972; Kaminski, 1978; Romaniuk, 1981). Now and then a memory returns spontaneously as idle thoughts or daydreams. Sometimes we purposely try to remember and reconstruct a moment from the past (Havighurst & Glasser, 1972). Both generate the reminiscence process.

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Merriam (1980) described four phases of reminiscence; selection, immersion, withdrawal, and closure. Selection is the actual choosing of the experience to be recalled; the search for the particular event to be recaptured. When the reminiscer either actively plunges into a story, becoming emotionally engrossed with vivid descriptions, or when the person merely passively recalls it is immersion. Withdrawal occurs when the participant distances himself or herself from the event as if only watching it rather than participating in it. The summing-up of the story, which may or may not have a moral to it closes the reminiscence process. What is not considered a form of reminiscence is the process of recalling facts in order to make a decision about a present situation or problem, such as remembering the names of people in order to make up a mailing list, or remembering how much money one contributed to charity in order to fill out an income tax form.

Reminiscence is not restricted to the latter part of the life cycle, people of all ages reminisce (Havighurst & Glasser, 1972; Lowenthal, Thurner, & Chiriboga, 1975; Schafer, 1968). Most of the reminiscence studies reviewed were not designed to

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substantiate the fact that older individuals think more about the past than younger people do. They simply assumed that older individuals think and/ or talk more about the past than younger individuals (Butler, 1963; Fallot, 1979; Lewis, 1970; Lieberman & Falk, 1971; Mc Mahon & Rhudick, 1964). In these studies the increased reminiscence behaviors identified have been attributed to different "stress" situations associated with aging, such as the stresses of approaching death (Butler, 1963) changes in mood (Fallot, 1979) changes in self concept and identity (Lewis, 1970) personal satisfaction (Lieberman & Falk, 1971) and depression (Mc Mahon & Rhudick, 1964). That reminiscing increases or is more frequent in the elderly is not universally accepted (Cameron, 1972; Giambra, 1974).

Cameron (1972) conducted reminiscence studies over a four year period with large and diverse samples. He used a "consciousness" sampling method that calls for the interruption of participants and asking them what they were thinking about. The responses were divided into three categories; past, present, and future. Analysis of data indicated that for each study and in all age groupings, the order of decreasing time orientation ran present, future, and past. Giambra

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(1974) studied day-dreaming patterns across the life span to determine the relationship of day-dreaming, past, present, and future content, and age. The Imaginal Process Inventory, a day-dream survey, was administered to a cross-sectional sample of 1100 persons aged 17 - 92. Data analysis indicated that day-dreaming frequency and the frequency of past-oriented day-dreams were not greater for his elderly subjects. He did note a decrease in thinking about the future in older individuals. Although the notion that the elderly think more about their past is not supported, Giambra's study conceptualized day-dreaming as a style of reminiscence used by the elderly.

Mc Mahon and Rhudick (1964) were first to theorize that older individuals differ in their styles of reminiscence. Their categories of reminiscence evolved while researching Spanish-American War Veterans. The study was designed to determine the adaptional significance of reminiscence. Mc Mahon and Rhudick were able to note the relationship of reminiscence with intellectual function, and to examine the association of reminiscence with the presence or absence of depression. The subjects, with a mean age of 81, were assigned to one of four groups based on their personal

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use of reminiscence. The veteran-subjects who coped well with age-related changes reminisced a lot. They were able to demonstrate how reminiscing can be a useful coping mechanism with the problems of aging. These were identified as "the maintenance of self-esteem in the face of declining physical and intellectual abilities; coping with grief and depression resolution from personal losses; finding means to contribute significantly to a society of which older persons are members; and retaining some sense of identity in an increasingly estranged environment" (p. 64). Mc Mahon and Rhudick described their "best adjusted" group, quite simply, as storytellers. Three styles of reminiscence were labeled; storytelling or informational reminiscence, the life review or evaluative reminiscence, and obsessive reminiscence which seemed to be the result of unsuccessful resolution of conflict. The life review had previously been postulated by Butler (1963) as an adaptive style of reminiscence in which the aging person progressively remembers more of his past experiences and re-examines and re-integrates unresolved conflicts.

Storytelling or informational reminiscence was the style most often used by the veterans (Butler, 1964).

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The reminiscences elicited by their storytelling focused on the factual material they recalled rather than on its relevance for a re-evaluation of the personality. For the veterans, storytelling served the personal function of enhancing self-esteem. The veterans categorized as storytellers, who recollected past experiences in an informal way, also "seemed" more adjusted, implying an adaptive value for individuals who use this particular style of reminiscing.

Mc Mahon and Rhudick's description of three styles of reminiscence would impact on subsequent reminiscence studies (Butler, 1972; Coleman, 1974; Lo Gerfo, 1980; Lieberman & Falk, 1971; Lowenthal & Chiriboga, 1973; Merriam, 1980). Other styles less frequently cited in literature include obsessive reminiscing (Butler, 1963), negative reminiscing (Fry, 1983), group reminiscing (Ebersole, 1976), and intrapersonal and interpersonal (Molinari & Reichlin, 1985). Although these labels have been suggested by researchers in an attempt to define types of reminiscence, labeling is still incomplete and inconsistent and a permanent framework has not been developed. It was noted that although researchers used the term storytelling and informational reminiscence interchangeably, no one has

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investigated the essence of storytelling in reminiscence literature and few researchers have used the life story to study the phenomenon of reminiscence (Fallot, 1976). Informational reminiscence or storytelling is the style of reminiscence most frequently cited. This style of reminiscence is congruent with the grounded theory method of qualitative research which is descriptive, concerned with the process and not simply with the outcome and is inductively analyzed. The narrative structure of the story individuals tell when reminiscing have the natural setting as the source of data and contributed to our understanding of the meaningfulness of everyday life as they reveal what was important to them in the past and why. Meaning is the essential concern of the qualitative method. This significant relationship will be discussed.

Reminiscence: Stories and Narrative

Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging to our lives. Storytelling is considered a "folk-art" out of the primal urge to express what has been seen, heard and experienced (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 83). It is one of the "oldest traditional arts having its roots in

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the beginning of articulate expression" (Rubin, 1986, p. 10). Due to the "narrative nature of human beings", people have the "impulse to narrate" (Banks, 1982; Bell, 1988; Brody, 1987; Heilbrun, 1988; Polkinghorn, 1988) and the activity of storytelling provides the "re-conceptualization of human beings as narrators and of their tellings as works of art to be valued" (White, 1980, p. 5). In this study the "tellings" relate to one's life story, defined as the psychic representation of one's personal history. Included in the life story is both a description of the public events and experiences of one's life and a personal explanation of their impact and significance. Stories provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). People's stories reveal qualities of their character and past behavior related to specific events that indicate a great deal about their personality and inner nature. Hidden themes of "great vintage" may emerge (Rubin, 1986, p. 27).

Boden and Del Vento (1983) used conversational analysis to find out the significance of the life story, narratives and reminiscences in the lives of the elderly. The sampled recordings of conversations

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between three cross-sex elderly dyads were examined and compared with comparable data collected from 15 dyadic conversations among young adults. In conversation, the elderly not only accomplished their business through personal narrative but also recalled the past in the context of the present through the exchange of fundamental biographical information. Such management of past events and personal biography appears to be a unique feature in the conversation of elderly individuals. The findings indicate that older individuals readily recall the past in the context of the present. This helps them to achieve a shared sense of meaning, a feature not readily apparent among young adults.

According to Giles (1992) communication is central to development and informs the individual of his or her place in the social structure. Therefore, it is essential that the social interactions of elderly individuals remain active. Positive interactions may lead to situations which provide an opportunity to defend one's self-esteem. As one ages there often is less opportunity to communicate with peers because of retirement, physical limitations or loss of friends. Storytelling as a style of reminiscing may facilitate

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verbal communication between the elderly and individuals in other stages of life because by its nature, it is interpersonal. Giles (1992) concluded that reminiscing seems to be a tool of communication for the elderly with the potential to facilitate the maintenance of their social worlds through their continued personal growth and development.

One significant category identified by researchers relates to the developmental aspects of reminiscence that attempts to explain the achievement of ego-integrity or despair in the elderly (Erickson, 1950). The other category deals with the adaptive values of the reminiscing. Both are important areas to investigate as they may impact on how one feels about past life experiences and the meaning of reminiscence.

Reminiscence: Significant Studies

Erickson (1978) included old age as one of the developmental concerns of the life cycle. He weighed the last stage, ego-integrity, as importantly as each of the other eight stages in his model. Ego-integrity was used to substantiate research on reminiscence by (Boylin, et al., 1976; Carlson, 1984; Fallot, 1980; Gorney, 1968; Lewis, 1971; Perrotta & Meacham, 1982; Revere, 1970). These authors conceptualized ego-

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integrity as a state of being which may be strengthened through reminiscence. Gorney (1968) examined the notion that as individuals age, they reminisced as a means of resolving past conflicts and developing a sense of ego-integrity. On a similar theme, Lewis (1971) proposed that the function of reminiscence is to reduce conflict between former and present self-concepts as measured by Q sorts, and that the reduction of conflict would be higher for reminiscers than nonreminiscers. He further hypothesized that following an experimental condition of threat to self-esteem, self-concept congruence would increase more in the reminiscer than in the non-reminiscer group. Only the second of these hypotheses was confirmed in an empirical test. Lewis concluded that certain elderly adults ward off threats to their self-esteem by actively forming a cognitive link between the past and present. Because ego-integrity is threatened in old age reminiscence may be an effective means of increasing ego-integrity in the elderly (Lewis, 1971).

A study was designed by (Boylin, et al., 1976) to determine the relationship between ego-integrity and reminiscing in a sample of 41 elderly institutionalized men. Subscales to measure resolution of Erickson's

Rem

crisis were developed. The items were considered to have face validity, but the reliability and validity estimates of the adjustment subscales were not made. The researchers reported that memories tend to focus upon childhood and early adulthood, and that age does not appear to be related to frequency of reminiscence activity. A significant positive correlation was found between frequency of reminiscence and scores on a measure of ego-integrity. This study supported other findings that linked reminiscing and achievement of ego-integrity in old age.

Carlson (1984) postulated that old age challenges the individual's ability to find meaning and value. In a study using interview techniques to determine the relationship between reminiscence and ego-integrity, she hypothesized that non-institutionalized elderly would possess psychological stability and a sense of identity due to reminiscing behavior. Eight elderly community residents were interviewed for one hour each during which time four questions were asked to assess ego-integrity. Carlson's analysis of the interview data indicated that six of the eight participants demonstrated ego-integrity. Although five of the six were considered reminiscers, Carlson failed to indicate

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how that conclusion was obtained. Carlson's elderly participants "expressed a need to maintain a sense of themselves as worthy participants in life whose efforts and accomplishments had, and continued to have, validity" (Carlson, 1984, p. 88). The role of reminiscence in achieving ego-integrity, a sense of identity, self-esteem, and meaning in the aged were supported. Revere (1971) found that many elderly adults reminisce at length without ever attaining Erickson's goal of self-acceptance obtaining results inconsistent with those of Gorney, Boylin, Havighurst and Glaser, and Carlson.

In an attempt to expand the understanding of ego development, Fallot (1976) developed a life story framework to elicit styles of reminiscence in elderly adults. He believed that one's life story involved how one thought about and related to one's own life. His study explored the nature of the life story and its various styles of presentation and the impact on mood of verbal reminiscing. The 36 female subjects' ages ranged from 46 - 85. In the initial interview, four questionnaires were sequentially completed: the Life Satisfaction Inventory (Neugarten, Havighurst, and Tobin, 1961), time perspective ratings (Bortner &

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Hultsch, 1972), subscales of the Imaginal Processes Inventory (Singer & Antrobus, 1966), and the Self Rating Depression Scale (Zung, 1965). Each subject was interviewed individually in three separate one hour sessions. In the non-directive interviews the subject was asked to "recount one's life story". Self ratings of mood were recorded before and after each interview. The subjects' moods were also rated by the investigator. Fallot further categorized the styles of reminiscences, the life story presentation, as either Affirming, Negating, or Despairing. The Affirming style was characterized by a subject's general sense of self-acceptance in both positive and negative experiences. In the Negative style the subjects distanced themselves from negative life events. In the Despairing style, the individual demonstrated unresolved feelings towards earlier conflicts and negative experiences. Findings indicated that a trend from higher to lower levels of ego development was associated with styles of reminiscence in the direction predicted. Women with Affirming styles had higher levels of ego development than women with the negating styles. Resilience seemed the most likely explanation

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for cases that did not fit predictions but Fallot failed to explain these findings.

Studying the developmental aspects of reminiscence, Lieberman and Falk (1971) concluded that distance from death was not clearly associated with the amount of reminiscing engaged in by the elderly, but chronological age showed a strong positive relationship to the increased practice. This study also suggested that the elderly do reminisce more when under stress and provided support for the contention that reminiscing is related to developmental processes in the elderly.

Perrotta and Meacham (1982) studied the adaptive value of reminiscence and its effect on depression and self-esteem in the elderly. They hypothesized that structured reminiscence intervention would reduce depression, increase self-esteem and ego-integrity in elderly community residents. Twenty-one community residents with a mean age of 77, currently being treated for mild depression, were placed in groups of seven. The main treatment group engaged in structured reminiscence sessions with a trained therapist for 45 minutes each week for five weeks. One of the two control groups received current life events

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intervention for five weeks, and one served as a no treatment control group. The hypothesis was not supported as reminiscence was not found to be an effective short-term therapeutic intervention. Neither depression nor self-esteem were affected as a result of the reminiscence interventions.

Liton and Olstein (1969) studied the adaptive aspects of structured reminiscence interventions. They presented case studies of four elderly senile clients who received structured reminiscence treatment on an individual basis in an institutional setting. A social worker provided hourly reminiscence sessions daily, for six weeks. Findings indicated that the client's social interactions and self-esteem increased during the period of the reminiscence sessions supporting the adaptive function of the practice. However, no follow-up was conducted and no controls were used to determine if the effects were sustained over time. A summary of their opinions regarding the adaptive value of reminiscence are as follows. Reminiscence provides the opportunity to recall the earlier roles in which the older person remembers him or herself as useful and competent. A review of past relationships and accomplishments allows the elderly individual to

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increase self-esteem and dignity and foster integrity and meaning. Liton and Olstein conceptualized reminiscence as a tool which links the past with the present. The elderly can re-invent themselves as they want to be seen by others as "young, beautiful, clever, lively and important (1969, p. 264). Others concluded that in order to achieve successful adaptation in the later years the individual needs to be able to cope with life stressors, problem solve, adjust to loss and decline, and retain a level of self-esteem (Erickson, 1959; Lowenthal, et al., 1976).

In summary, consciousness provides the basis for reminiscence, the spontaneous or purposeful recall of past events or experiences retrieved from one's memories. Reminiscence is a multifaceted, abstract phenomenon comprising different forms and fulfilling different functions. Reminiscences content is not focused on a particular period of the life cycle and may involve any moment or moments from the past. Reminiscences are individually unique with the practice evident at all stages of life. Clear-cut evidence supporting the conclusion that the elderly reminisced more about childhood is not apparent, nor was there a relationship found between age and reminiscing

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frequency. Meaning was assigned to the practice by theorists (Erickson, 1978; Revere, 1971; and Romaniuk, 1981).

The initial classification of reminiscence styles evolved from Mc Mahon and Rhudick's (1964) classic study conducted with Spanish-American War veterans in an effort to determine the adaptational value of the practice. Many researchers have since then used the categories, and others have added to them. Although almost thirty years have elapsed since Mc Mahon and Rhudick concluded that the best adjusted subjects were the storytellers, who used the informational style of reminiscence, no one has investigated the essence of storytelling or its significance for reminiscence. However, the life story was addressed by Fallot (1976).

According to White (1980) individuals have the impulse to narrate. People want to express what they have seen, heard and experienced (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Boden and DelVento (1983) contend that the elderly do have a unique conversational feature; they recall their past in the context of the present spontaneously in daily conversations in a meaningful way. These narratives may provide salient information about individuals.

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Categories of reminiscence are diverse, definitions are inconsistent, and no framework exists for the classification of the styles of reminiscence as a model for practice. The narrative provides the data for a qualitative study designed to understand the meaning of a phenomenon.

The literature dealing with the developmental aspects of reminiscence and its effectiveness in enhancing ego-integrity was reviewed. As ego-integrity is threatened in old age, reminiscing may promote its achievement (Lewis, 1971). Studies of the effectiveness of reminiscence in enhancing ego-integrity in the elderly resulted in contradictory findings (Carlson, 1984; Perrotta & Meacham, 1982). Revere (1971) obtained results inconsistent with those of Gorney, Boylin, Havighurst and Glaser, and Carlson. She found that many elderly adults reminisce at length without ever attaining Erickson's self-acceptance.

In the second category, although one would not dismiss the notion that reminiscence may be adaptive under certain conditions, the data regarding adaptive value are inconclusive, but do provide evidence that reminiscence serves to increase perceived meaning in the elderly. After twenty years of sporadic research

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on reminiscence, we are still not certain of the value or meaning of this practice.

Reminiscence: Memory and Meaning

Reminiscence is a function of memory, consequently, it seems relevant to explore memory in order to expand the understanding of reminiscence. Memory research had largely focused on the correctness of recall and the reasons for error and forgetting until Neisser (1978) concluded that it was just as important to understand the use of memories and the work they do in everyday life. "Memory shames us. It pains us. It can deceive. It can entertain us. It can tell us our beginnings" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.76). The memories a person has of his or her life are autobiographical and people have a tendency "to share with others what has already moved them deeply" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 51). But, one of the least well-developed areas of memory study is autobiographical memory.

Autobiographical Memory

Autobiographical memory shares properties with all human memory. Being highly organized, it tends to preserve the general "gist of events or experiences", or "series of events and experiences", but "not usually

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the details" (Neisser, 1978, p. 87). According to Birren they are extensive, requiring "search and decision for retrieval and the events and experiences remembered can change and be reconstructed because of the time span over which they are remembered" (1987, p. 56).

Tulving (1972, p. 64) on the other hand postulated that autobiographical memories represent "life events and experiences as they actually occurred and there is little change in what is remembered over time". For Tulving, autobiographical memories have "distinct, enduring, and episodic qualities", basically there is truthfulness to one's autobiographical recollections.

Memory and Meaning

The earliest studies on memory, memory patterns and meaning were conducted by Adler (1931) who suggested that people's memories not only can give us a quick idea of how they see themselves but also communicate what they value as meaningful in their lives. This conclusion is supported by Berger and Luckman (1967). In addition, they contended that only a fraction of life events and experiences are retained in the consciousness and, the ones that are registered become "sedimented", that is, "they congeal in

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recollection as recognizable and measurable entities" (p. 74). Although Berger and Luckman (1967) provided no clarification of this phenomenon, their proposal of a concept of "sedimentation" has proven quite helpful for understanding the elderly. This "sedimentation" provides the foundation for one's autobiographical memories remembered as reminiscences.

This relevance has already been established by Straus (1966) whose theory is congruent with Adler's, specifically what the individual has "perceived as memorable is what is remembered" or, as he calls it, the "Novum" (p. 74). Occurrences that are unusual and significantly different are the ones that become "disengaged, arrested and therefore registered and later remembered in personal recollections" (p. 74). According to Straus, "The Novum is selected not only because of its distinction from the past but also through its importance for the future" (p. 75). What is remembered most vividly is what has "life meaning" for us (p. 75). The moments of great significance in a person's life are seen as highly meaningful and perceived as having made a lasting impression on the person as a result. These random, novel happenings are woven into the existing whole of one's autobiographical

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memory according to their pattern and form, occurrence, and social significance.

Neisser (1982) conducted a study with elderly community residents in an attempt to identify memories elicited during their conversations. The participants were elderly individuals who participated in an urban senior citizen center's activities. The subjects were randomly selected. The mean age was 72. Conversations were recorded in their natural setting, and transcribed. Analysis of the content of the conversations supported Neisser's argument. The elderly studied reminisced more about childhood events than events in any other stage of life. Significant events in the life span, as births and deaths, were also frequently recalled. He further concluded that from memories one would learn how an individual felt about himself or herself. Since certain past events or experiences can be spontaneously or purposively recalled either consciously or unconsciously, shows that they are personally memorable. In addition, he contended that "early childhood memories are uniquely significant since they represent the individual's fundamental starting point, the beginning of an autobiography that the individual has made for

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himself/herself." For the majority of subjects, pleasant feelings were associated with the reminiscing. Personal narratives were spontaneously and collaboratively produced in conversation between speaker and hearer and a shared sense of meaning was achieved through the communication (Neisser, 1982).

Memory and Emotions

The affect or feeling tone associated with memories is another area of interest for the phenomenon of reminiscence. Rapaport (1971) maintained that emotionally loaded experiences connected with strong feelings such as anger, shame, fear, or appreciation are more easily remembered than experiences that had no emotional tone. Kowolski, Susulelta, and Peters (cited in Rapaport, 1971) concluded that most memories were highly charged emotional events or experiences; more of the memories recalled were related to positive themes and pleasant past happenings; memories with unpleasant or disturbing themes occurred less often. They concluded that pleasant past memories are not only more numerous than the unpleasant ones but are also more precise. These observations are congruent with Freud's (1949) theory of repression and forgetting. Freud stated that people repressed unpleasant thoughts

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that, if remembered, might evoke pain. However, since this study is on reminiscence which focuses on memories of what is remembered rather than what is forgotten, Freud's theory will not be included for further discussion.

Rapaport's findings (1971) from memory studies with subjects throughout the life span indicated that the relationship between memory and affect is mainly determined by intensity and not by pleasantness or unpleasantness. Life events of extremes of emotions, pleasurable or not are more often retained and remembered than are experiences associated with less emotion. These findings correlate with Straus' view of the Novum, the meaningful. Any life event or situation that can be described as highly significant will be charged with pleasurable or unpleasurable emotions. There is no prevalent theoretical base concerned with the impact of the emotional content of memorable past experiences on our current understanding of them. Straus (1966, p. 80) contended that from a "comfortable present as the vantage point to reflect on difficult past events", we are unable to reproduce the emotional expression of those experiences: "We may still remember that we were excited, but we can hardly re-

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experience the excitement." Marsh (1976) on the other hand, argued that if we recall extremely charged past events or experiences, such as an accident or the loss of a person close to us, "their emotional tone although dormant may be very much with us, perhaps so much so that they may release feelings that even seem more real than the present" (p. 86).

There are still many unanswered questions about memory in general. For example, do we remember only those events that are significant and meaningful at the end of the life span? Are the highly charged emotional moments of life then indelible reminders of the past that penetrate the depths of conscience and become our essence? Do insignificant events fade out of the spectrum of retrieval to be forgotten in old age? What do the elderly consider as meaningful, and why?

In summary, reviewing studies on memory provides a new approach to the study of reminiscence. The memories a person has are autobiographical and conflicting theories exist regarding their recall. One opinion is that individuals use their memories to continuously re-invent themselves (Birren, 1987), while others contend that they are accurate and authentic (Neisser, 1978; Tulving, 1972). The reminiscences

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depend on the person's original perception and comprehension of those events or experiences; those remembered are meaningful for the individual. Only a small portion of one's life experiences are remembered and reminisced. What is remembered is crystallized or sedimented. The Novum, novel, or memorable experience is remembered (Adler, 1931; Berger & Luckman, 1967; Straus, 1966). The affect or emotional tone associated with the experience influences how it is recalled (Marsh, 1976; Straus, 1976). Reminiscence is not a recycling of memories, but a search for meaning.

Philosophical Perspective:

Meaning, a Vital Element in Human Life

A search for meaning, the will to meaning is the central motivational factor present in humans (Frankl, 1959). It is intrinsic to being human; to reach out for meaning, to fulfill or to be connected to something or someone else. Frankl's (1959) logotherapy theorizes that meaning in life can be discovered in three ways: by doing a deed, experiencing a value or suffering. The first happens when a person sets a goal and accomplishes a task which is of personal value. People often experience meaning when they reach out and help someone either spontaneously or purposively. Life can

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be seen as a succession of experiences or tasks to be accomplished with their meaning in terms of subsequent accomplishments possibly determined only in retrospect. The second way refers to understanding the value of something such as art, nature, a pet, or person through love which is essential for the achievement of meaning. The third way of finding meaning in life by suffering occurs when a person experiences a fate that cannot be changed. Loss of a family member, friend, or job are some examples and provide the ultimate opportunity to realize what has the highest value for one's life, to fulfill the deepest meaning, the meaning of suffering. According to this theory, what matters is the person's attitude toward the suffering and how they accept life's circumstances. Material rewards, money or power can also be associated with the meaning and connectedness but Frankl stated that these other factors can never be the central motivational factors in an individual's life, and sometimes they can act as detractors, and often they contradict the will to meaning.

Frankl (1962) studied the concept of alienation, a sense of estrangement, abandonment, of not belonging. Alienation is characterized as a loss of interest, or a

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lack of initiative. Frankl attributed these reactions to an "existential vacuum", a feeling of meaninglessness or inner emptiness. It is believed that this alienation or existential vacuum has a greater impact on the elderly than other life span ages due to age related losses and unmet developmental needs.

Frankl's logotherapy is congruent with a study of reminiscence by well elderly individuals for whom the achievement of an integrated personality is intrinsic to their developmental stage. It is based on dignity and respect for the life potential of each human being. It assumes that humans are self-determining. It is humanistic and individualistic and embraces hope and purpose. The principles of logotherapy are applicable within all fields of human service, but they are of particular value when working with the elderly who try to find meaning when faced with the age related declines due to the aging process and a limited future.

Recker, Peacock, and Wong (1980, p. 45) defined meaning as "making sense, connoting order, or coherence, out of one's existence" and personal meaning was identified as a "basic human impulse". The importance of meaning in life has been stressed by

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several authors (Batista & Almond, 1973; Fisk, 1980; Frankl, 1959, 1967; Kotchem, 1960; Maddi, 1967; Recker & Wong, 1987; Romaniuk, 1981; Yalom, 1980).

Yalom (1980, p. 163) tried to explain why people naturally seek meaning in their lives and contended that "humans have a natural regulator for perceptual, neurological and psychological functions that stimulates them to respond to random incoming stimuli, organizing them into a patterns of knowing that makes logical sense for them". The inability to make sense out of some experience can result in an individual becoming overwhelmed with fear and anxiety. We experience "dysphoria in the face of an indifferent, unpatterned world and search for patterns, explanations, and the meaning of existence" (Yalom, 1980, p. 163). This helps to explain an individual's remarks to life's random happenings when he or she says, "Why is this happening?"

Existentialists, (Becker, 1973; Camus, 1955; Sartre, 1956; Yalom, 1980) contend that personal meaning is created by the individual. Therefore, personal meaning is created deliberately, and a personal meaning system is self generated by an individual in response to the human and environmental

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conditions in which he or she lives (Becker, 1973; Camus, 1955; Yalom, 1980).

Recker and Wong (1986) defined personal meaning as being concerned with "the meaning of life". They concluded that personal meaning is a "multidimensional construct made up of three components: cognitive, motivational and affective". The motivational and affective aspects deal with value systems and feelings respectively, but the cognitive aspect of personal meaning deals with "an accompanying sense of fulfillment from an understanding of one's past derived from one's memories" (p. 10).

Reminiscence: A Search for Meaning

Developmental psychologists have theorized about the development of meaning over the life course and the role personal meaning plays in relieving anxiety and depression when coping with the changes and stressors related to aging and other developmental crises (Buhler, 1968; Erickson, 1978; Jung, 1971).

Buhler (1968) identified four developmental phases that emphasize changes in goal setting. In the early phases, successes and failures in life are evaluated and new directions for the course of one's life contemplated. During the later phase, integration

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becomes the primary goal. For Jung (1971), meaning in the first half of life is derived through preparation for living; in the later years, meaning is derived through an examination of the "inner" part of life, by the process of self-reflection and re-evaluation and reminiscing.

Erickson's life span developmental theory (1963) is one of comprehensive psychosocial development. It integrates the processes of physical development and subsequent decline; psychosexual development; and the social process itself. Erickson defines the life cycle as "a link in the chain of generations in a given society from which it receives and to which it contributes both strength and fateful discord" (Erickson, 1978, p. 5).

In Erickson's model eight ego ages or stages, are identified. Each successive stage brings the individual into more complex activities and interpersonal relationships. Crises is faced at every stage of growth and development, and an individual's ability to synthesize the ego into "totality" is dependent upon the manner in which he or she deals with these crises. The strengths derived from each age's dilemma-resolving process are "virtues". During the

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final stage, Ego-Integrity vs. Despair, the elderly must evaluate their life experiences and accomplishments in terms of whether their major goals in life have been achieved (1978, p. 5). Depending on whether a person is able to find order and "meaning" to his or her life, the recollection of significant past events and accomplishments will result in ego-integrity or despair. Erickson defined "meaning" as "that which is felt to be the inner significance of something" (p. 5). Erickson's theory postulates that ego-integrity is directly related to meaning. If despair carries with it a clear sense of failure, integrity is regarded as success. Achieving integrity means coming to terms with oneself and "accepting their life as a totality with all its losses and gains; the acceptance of the significant people in one's life whether they were negative or positive influences; the acceptance of one's parents; an acceptance of diverse generations" as one is reaching the end of the life span (Erickson, 1980, p. 104).

Erickson found meaning in old age to be a result of personal endurance from having successfully navigated through the stages of the life span. Reminiscence provides the medium to reflect on these

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opportunities. Reminiscences are linked to the growth of one's identity as they help to maintain the relationship with previous parts of the self. Reminiscence is important for "psychological health and satisfactory adjustment in old age and is viewed as an integration process with positive value" (Erickson, 1980, p. 104).

Rapaport (1970, p. 70) contended that we "absorb into our awareness those experiences that are memorable" and that reminiscing about those experiences may also be perceived as a search for meaning. Bartlett (1932) believed that "remembrance is an effort after meaning" (p. 98). The past becomes meaningful "through its relation to, and distinction from, the qualities related to the personal order of time" (p. 98). Reminiscences of past joys and sorrows are usually contrasted with present ones. This can lead to a new perspective on the past. Husserl (1964) conceptualized reminiscence as a search for meaning. Many of his theories are based on James' (1963) concept, the "stream of consciousness" (p. 64). Husserl (1964) conceptualized memory as a "flux". Each experience leads from the now to a new now and so on. As experiences are layered upon past experience,

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assimilated, and reminisced, at some point in one's life, one may gain a new insight into a past event and the meaning may change accordingly. "Consciousness has streamed past" (James, 1963, p. 64). What was once the future has become the past. A new meaning is attached to a particular moment in the past because we now know what happened.

Kvale (1976, p. 31) concluded that the previous "not knowing what comes next in perception has in remembering becomes a knowledge of what came next". Kvale (1976) labeled this process of changing the meaning of earlier actions as a result of situations in the here and now, "meaning retroaction" (p. 29). From (1971) called this phenomenon "retroactive reordering" (p. 46). And Straus (1966) proposes the idea of meaning retroaction differently. He said, "When we are experiencing an event, we may be anxious about its outcome; however, when we look back on the event later on, we already know what the outcome was" (p. 89). According to Straus, the meaning of memory is better ascertained by noting the relationship between past and present.

Cox (1990, p. 21) concluded that a sense of satisfaction in life and meaning is more common than is

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recognized, but not as common as it could be. It is a quality of serenity and wisdom which comes from the resolution of personal conflicts, from reviewing one's life and finding it acceptable. A person's life does not have to be a "success" in order to result in meaning. It can come from a feeling of having done one's best, from having met challenges and sometimes from the knowledge of just having survived when the odds were against oneself.

In summary, meaning is a vital element in human life. Personal meaning is an individual, generative process with a cognitive component related to one's memories. A sense of fulfillment is experienced when one's memories facilitate an understanding of one's past (Recker & Wong, 1986).

The development of meaning over the life course has been linked to reminiscence (Buhler, 1963; Erickson, 1978; Jung, 1971). The life cycle is viewed as a link in the chain of generations by Erickson (1978) and the stages of his life cycle model guide the aging process. The achievement of the final virtue, integrity, is the product of a lifetime well remembered and implies a coming to terms with oneself (Erickson, 1978). Reminiscence is a natural developmental aspect

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of aging which has meaning for the elderly (Erickson, 1978). This concept is supported by From (1971), Kvale (1976), and Straus (1966). Reminiscence is the tool used for reflecting on one's past as a search for meaning (Rapaport, 1971). New meaning may be assigned to the past event; a new insight and new meaning may result (Husserl, 1964).

Significance of the Study

From ancient times, reminiscence has been associated with old age, and attitudes toward remembering the past have been a measure of a society's attitude toward older people. As the population of persons over the age of 65 is growing twice as fast as other age groups, and more of them are considered well elderly, continued resources are needed to dispel the myths of aging and to promote growth and development throughout the life span. Reminiscence has been thought by some to be an ineffective defense against aging, a result of a lack of interest in the present world, a mental defect, a manifestation of intellectual deterioration, or an insidious habit (Aristotle, 367 - 347 B.C.; Fisk, 1979; Havighurst & Glasser, 1972; Lampe, 1961). An enduring image of the elderly links the age old practice of reminiscence with hopelessness,

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denial of death, a turning away from present reality, loss of memory, intellectual deterioration and despair (Burnside, 1981), labeling the elderly who reminisced as eccentric and senile (Maddox, 1987).

Contemporary theorists, Kart (1990) and Matteson (1984) contend that the reminiscence process may allow the elderly to recapture some feelings of youth, competence, attractiveness, and closeness to others. Senility is no longer seen as inevitably linked with age but as a disease or group of diseases. Reminiscence, previously conceived to be "aimless wandering of the mind," has come to be recognized as a natural process (Maddox, 1987, p. 136) that has meaning for elderly individuals (Erickson, 1978; Revere, 1971; and Romaniuk, 1981).

Sacks (1972) concluded that older individuals weave the past with the present in personal narratives that are spontaneously produced. Autobiographical memories are used to establish identity (Boden & Del Vento, 1983). Talking about the past is one way of portraying the self and of looking at a one's past coping mechanisms. Often these can be applied to current problem-solving in light of age related decline and loss. Others concluded that reminiscence can

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promote interaction (Matteson & Munsat, 1982), stimulate personal awareness (Lappe, 1987), and assists in meshing lives with those who have had similar experiences (Burnside, 1976). A therapeutic environment is constructed when the elderly perceive that their memories are valued (Burnside, 1976). But there are contradictory findings and inconclusive support for generalizations.

Reminiscence may help to either affirm or disaffirm the value of one's life in search of personal meaning at the end of the life span. Practices that support the needs of the elderly should be understood, studied and encouraged. An understanding of reminiscence may help to identify the population who would benefit from it and those who would not. Asking the elderly about it would expand our knowledge and lead to new ways to foster their growth and development as its meaning is explicated.

Nursing, as the largest and most highly visible professional group of health care providers, should be concerned with new ways to support health promotion practices and to provide for the achievement of developmental needs of the well elderly living in the community. Gerontological nursing in the United States

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is evolving into a distinct practice setting. Nurses have always taken care of the elderly but they are doing so even more today because of the increased elderly population. Only recently has work with healthy aged individuals become a major area of curriculum content in nursing education. Previously, students' interactions with older people had only taken place in long-term care facilities or in acute care settings. A change to include work with healthy aged individuals in the community provides students with an opportunity to grasp wholeness and to gain a perspective on human growth and development in the late stages of life. Today's nurses will be better positioned to promote health in elderly clients and to dispel other myths of aging. As study findings regarding the significance of reminiscence have been inconclusive, continued studies are needed to develop a model for practice. A qualitative research design is best suited to learn about the meaning of experiences and can help to generate and validate new theoretical ideas regarding reminiscence.

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CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This chapter includes the purpose of the study, an overview of the method, the statement of the problem, definition of terms, the assumptions, and the limitations of the study. The description of the subjects, procedures of data collection, and data analysis will also be discussed.

Purpose of the Study

Increased life expectancy, improved health, and trends in the make-up of the population point to a need to focus our research efforts on the unique aspects of aging and the developmental needs of the well elderly living in the community. Reminiscence is recognized as a natural developmental process of aging. People of all ages reminisce but, because reminiscing seems to be more significant and meaningful for the elderly, it is important to examine the meaning that the elderly reminiscer gives this practice.

It must also be noted that many early reminiscence studies were conducted with the elderly in institutional settings. These studies cited possible therapeutic findings from reminiscence interventions, such as decreased depression, and increased self-

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esteem. As a result, the emphasis in subsequent reminiscence studies has been on the outcomes of interventions with this practice. Although outcomes are important, researchers need to study the qualitative aspects of the phenomenon. It is important to use a qualitative research design because few studies have been conducted dealing with the qualitative aspects of reminiscence. No one has asked older people to tell us how they feel about it. A qualitative approach is best suited to learn about the meaning of experiences and should be used to learn what the well elderly are experiencing by reminiscing, what it means to them, and how they structure the world in which they live as a result. Explication of the meaning of reminiscence is necessary in order to learn if the practice should be encouraged or not.

Overview of the Method

The grounded theory method was used to collect and analyze data in this qualitative study on the practice of reminiscence by the well elderly living in the community in order to examine the meaning they give to reminiscence.

Grounded theory methodology combines inductive and deductive approaches in generating theory from the

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study's data. Developed from the symbolic interactionist view of human behavior, grounded theory methodology is a systematic approach for the development of theories regarding human behavior and the social world (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). This methodology is appropriate when looking at a variety of nursing situations or phenomena which cannot be studied from a quantitative perspective (Jackson, 1975; Jacobson, 1971; Stern, 1980). This approach allows a new way of understanding the observed interactions and is particularly relevant to the phenomenon of reminiscence. The qualitative research approach has the natural setting as the direct source of data because this process uses observations and interviews collected from the environments in which the participants live. Using this method, empirical data are understood at the next level of abstraction through the identification of patterns and themes, which are organized as theoretical categories, through a method of concept reduction (Burns & Grove, 1987). The researcher is led toward the central theme or pattern that links the data and, it may become the basis for theory generation.

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As Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggested, the scientific rigor of this process is determined not in terms of reliability and validity but rather in terms of credibility, confirmability, auditability and fittingness. The researcher's sensitivity, conceptual ability, creativity, and insight must all come into play and the researcher is the key instrument.

Theory generated from this empirical base is then grounded by examining its fit with external sources in the literature that shed light on the same phenomenon (Burns & Grove, 1987; Glasser, 1987). The method of evaluating the adequacy of the emerging explanation of the phenomenon was described by Glasser and Strauss (1967).

Statement of the Problem

A review of the literature on reminiscence indicates that it is an important still unexplained phenomenon to understand from the developmental perspective of well elderly individuals who are living in the community. No studies exploring the meaning of reminiscence for the reminiscer were found. The question asked is: What is the meaning of reminiscence for well elderly individuals?

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Definition of Terms

Reminiscence is the recall of past events, feelings and experiences which occurred at least one year ago.

The Past is any time or event which occurred over 1 year prior to the time the data were collected.

Well Elderly are persons over 65, experiencing age related changes and live in the community.

Personal Meaning is making sense out of one's experiences in life; feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment; that which is felt to be the inner significance of something (Erickson, 1978)

Life-Story Trajectories refers to life pathways. It comprises three divergent life pathways or styles of recounting the life story; Affirming, Negating and Despairing. The individuals are labeled Affirmers, Negaters, and Despairers respectively (Fallot, 1976).

The Affirming Style is characterized by a general sense of acceptance in both positive and negative experiences. The individual is an Affirmer (Fallot, 1976).

The Negating Style is characterized by distancing or the exclusion of negative experiences in the narrated life story. The individual is a Negator (Fallot, 1976).

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The Despairing Style is characterized by the individual's painful awareness of unresolved conflict with themes of loss and a negative tone prevailing.

The individual is a Despairer (Fallot, 1976).

Narratives of the-Novum refers to new, notable emotionally charged experiences over the life course.

A Leaving-of-Legacies refers to tangible or intangible links, as personal property, a generational transmission of values, or a lifetime of memories that may provide a transcendent feeling of continuation.

A Making-of-Spiritual-Links refers to the spiritual domain, personal beliefs, references to God, or to the church and to the church ministry in reminiscences.

Internal locus of control is the perception that positive and negative life events are a consequence of one's own actions or attributes and thereby are under personal control. Behavior is perceived as affecting one's life and determining one's future (Rotter, 1975).

External locus of control is the perception that positive and negative life events are unrelated to one's behavior and thereby are beyond personal control. Life events are perceived as being contingent upon chance, fate, powerful others, or unpredictable elements (Rotter, 1975).

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Assumptions

The well elderly subjects were able to articulate their feelings regarding the personal meaning of their reminiscences.

Limitations

The study was limited to the well elderly, persons over 65 who experience age related changes and who live in the community. The results of this study will not be generalizable beyond the study sample.

Description of the Subjects

The sample consists of eight well elderly individuals age 65 and over who are cognitively intact, independent, and live in a residential home setting. According to the Statistical Abstract of the United States (1990) more than 75 percent of the elderly age 75 and over continue to live in their own homes. Of those age 85 and over, 46 percent still live at home, 30 percent alone and 16 percent at home with a spouse. An estimated 31 percent of the elderly age 85 and older live in the household of an adult child or other person, usually a relative.

No limitations were placed on the sample in regards to sex, marital status, ethnic background, race, or religious affiliation.

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Participants were obtained through referrals of the researcher's associates. During this process, the "Snowballing" (Babbie, 1979) occurred. One participant introduces the researcher to another and so on. The final sample size was determined at the point of data saturation, indicated when information obtained in the data collection became redundant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Procedure for Data Collection

The Grounded theory method in qualitative research emphasizes concurrent data collection, constant examination of conceptual interactions and linkages, and the conditions under which they occur.

Data were collected using a demographic data sheet (see Appendix B) and open-ended interview technique (see Appendix C). Demographic data included age, educational level, marital status, occupational status, number of children, and length of time in present home. Interviews were taped with permission of the participant and transcribed, and numbers were assigned to both the data sheets and tapes in order to protect subject's anonymity.

At the beginning of the interview this researcher explained the research, established rapport, and

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obtained consent from the participant (see Appendix A). The experience of reminiscence was obtained through semi-structured, in depth, face-to-face interviews conducted between the participant and the researcher. The open-ended interviews were conducted in the home of the participant or interviewer or in a mutually agreeable place that allowed for privacy and quiet. Participants were asked to describe what it is like and how they feel when they have reminisced and what effects they ascribe to it, explaining their thoughts and feelings any way they wanted in order to obtain a valid description of their individual experiences. Probes were used as needed (Appendix C).

Because qualitative studies involve the combination of data collection with analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) concurrent analysis determined the need for a follow-up interview to help with the description of the experience. Field notes were taken after each interview. The fieldnotes contained what the researcher saw, heard, observed and thought during the interaction. The researcher documented body language and nonverbal behavior in the field notes as well as any other significant expressions not recorded on tape. After each session, the researcher's impressions were

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also recorded as well as strategies and hunches pertaining to the session. The length of each interview was determined by how long it took the participants to describe their experience.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the grounded theory method which emphasizes concurrent data collection, and analysis, and allows for constant examination of conceptual linkages and the conditions under which they occur for emerging themes, patterns and unanticipated responses. Data collection ended when saturation occurred, where no new themes emerge.

The tapes, field notes and transcribed data were reviewed by the researcher for accuracy. Data from interviews were concurrently collected, and analyzed, and compared with each other using the described process. The themes that were identified from the narrated reminiscences of the eight well elderly participants were general and initially, they seemed uninteresting. The themes were reviewed and studied carefully. Patterns came into view. The patterns brought the themes to a higher level of abstraction as categories were developed. This was a slow and tedious process. As the categories were re-evaluated some were

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synthesized. The theoretical categories were developed. The tape recorded interview data validated the themes, categories, and theoretical descriptions that emerged. The relationships between categories provided the conceptual links needed to explicate the meaning of reminiscence for the well elderly living in the community. Additional literature related to the findings was used to explain the meaning of the data.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research cannot be evaluated according to the criteria traditionally used in positivistic research methodologies because it evolved from a different view of knowledge. The method of evaluation should be consistent with the methodology and paradigmatic view of the research (Morgan, 1983).

In order to establish the degree of validity and reliability, Guba and Lincoln (1985) established criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative data. The four factors in these criteria are truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Credibility, the criterion for the evaluation of the truth value of qualitative research was demonstrated in the following manner. The audio taped interviews assured that the data collected were

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actually what was said. They were the recordings of the human experiences of the subjects' reminiscences, and other readers were able to recognize the experience. Applicability of the research can be evaluated by its fit of the findings to the data as determined by emerging themes. The findings of the study can "fit into the contexts outside the study situation", (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 32) and the emerging themes are meaningful to others in the same population. Auditability is the criterion of rigor relating to the consistency of the qualitative findings. Auditability implies that another researcher would arrive at comparable conclusions given the researcher's data, perspective and situation (Sandelowski, 1986). The research materials related to all of the phases of the study are available for auditing. According to Lincoln and Guba (1981), confirmability is the criterion of neutrality in qualitative research. Finally, confirmability is achieved when auditability, truth value and applicability are established.

The goal of qualitative research is knowing and understanding not measurement. "Validity in qualitative research refers to gaining knowledge and

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understanding of the true nature, essence, meaning, attributes and characteristics of a particular phenomenon of study" (Leininger, 1985, p. 68). By explicating the meaning of reminiscence for the reminiscer and determining its relationship to the reminiscer, one addresses the concept of validity of qualitative research findings. The validity of an account is intrinsic in its relationship to those things that it is intended to be an account of (Hammersley, 1992; House, 1991; Maxwell, 1990a, b; Norris, 1983). The validity of a narrative is intrinsic to the narrator (White, 1980). Wilcott stated, "understanding is a more fundamental concept for qualitative research than validity" (1990a, p. 146).

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CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Data Collection

The grounded theory method with its constant comparative technique was used in this qualitative research study designed to explicate the meaning of reminiscence for the elderly living in the community. In this method of inquiry, data analysis is an ongoing process that entails an analysis of the interviews, fieldnotes, and related data as they occur, the recording of patterns and themes that emerge, as well as the unexpected. With each interview conducted new themes may be identified or the others may be supported. Data collection ends when no new themes emerge. The data analysis continues with the search for relationships, the evolution of concepts, and the development of a theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Sample Characteristics

Names of potential participants were gathered from church groups and referrals consistent with Babbie's (1979) "Snowballing" effect. Prospective participants who met the inclusion criteria were contacted by telephone by the researcher who introduced herself as a graduate student in Nursing from Adelphi University and

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stated the group or individual through whom she had obtained the person's name. She told the participant that she was conducting as doctoral research a study to:

find out the meaning of reminiscence for well elderly persons, over the age of 65, who live in the community. The definition of reminiscence in this study is that it is thinking or talking about the past. Anything that happened at least one year ago and is remembered is considered a reminiscence. The study involves one or more interviews, that must be tape recorded, to be conducted when it is convenient for you. Most people prefer to be interviewed in their own home, but arrangements can be made that would be mutually agreeable. Would you be willing to participate?

Everyone contacted in this manner agreed to participate. The sample consisted of eight participants, two males and six females. Names have been changed for confidentiality. The sample characteristics are displayed in Table 1.

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TABLE #1 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>Marital Status</u> | <u>Ed. Level</u> | <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Interview Place & Time</u> |
|-------------|------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Vera | 74 | W | H.S. | Homemaker | Home 1 1/2hr. |
| Sr.M | 74 | S | BA | Retired | Home 3 hr. |
| Jim | 65 | M | H.S. | Banker | Other 2 hr. |
| Bob | 73 | M | H.S. | Retired | Other 2 1/2hr. |
| Ruth | 70 | M | BS | Retired | Other 2 hr. |
| Helen | 73 | W | H.S. | Homemaker | Home 1 1/2hr. |
| May | 84 | W | H.S. | Homemaker | Home 3 hr. |
| Alice | 75 | W | H.S. | Homemaker | Home 2 1/2hr. |

Six participants were high school graduates and two held baccalaureate degrees. The ages of the participants ranged from 65 to 84 years with a mean of 73.5 years. Three of the participants were married, one of whom was a widower married for the second time. Four of the participants were widows. One participant had never married.

All of the participants who were married had children. The average was 3 children per participant. Four of the participants had grand-children. The average was 2.6 grand-children per participant. One participant had two great-grand-children.

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The occupational status of the participants consisted of one actively employed banker and four homemakers. The other three participants were retired. Their living arrangements were as follows: one participant lived in a convent home; two others have resided in the same private home for at least 10 years, now living alone; two have been living alone in apartment houses, and the other three lived with their spouses. The participants who lived alone were frequently visited by either their siblings, or their children and grand-children.

Seven of the participants stated that they like to reminisce. One participant stated that she does not like to reminisce but does. All of the participants stated that they reminisce orally and silently.

Vignettes

Participant #1 (Vera)

Vera is a 75 year old energetic female of Italian descent who has been a widow for the past 12 years. She still misses her husband, and lives alone in the private home she once shared with him. Two of Vera's four married children live close enough to visit often and the others keep in touch by phone. Vera spends a lot of time with her sisters and enjoys the company of

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a few close friends. It is easy for her to visit others; she still drives her own car and gets out every day.

When I arrived at her home for our interview appointment, I was warmly greeted. Vera is an attractive, slim woman of medium height. Her make-up was soft. Her hair was stylish. Her casual outfit was trendy. She looked much younger than her age. I was invited to sit in a comfortably decorated dining room. Her little Yorkshire Terrier barked fiercely until she quieted him with a few treats and an affectionate pat.

Vera reminisces a lot. She said that she always has but it's more important to her now that she is alone. A lot of her reminiscences are spontaneous because she just "finds herself thinking about something," but added, "I just like thinking about the happy times." She said that she can stop feeling "blue" by reminiscing.

Participant #2 (Sister Mary)

Sister Mary is a slim, grand-motherly woman of Irish descent, who has been a Sister of Charity for more than fifty years. She dresses in a modern version of the traditional nun's habit, a navy blue suit with a white blouse. Although her head is covered with a

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short matching blue veil, her curly grey hair that shows from underneath not only frames her face but softens her features. Sister's eyes sparkle beneath her bifocals. At 74 years of age, she seems to be agile and energetic.

Sister Mary has been retired from teaching for the past fifteen years. Now, some of her time is spent in the church ministry. As a Eucharistic Minister, she visits the homebound. One day a week is dedicated to the parish Respite Program for Alzheimer suffers who continue to live with their families. On weekends, Sister journeys to the mother-house up-state with some of the other sisters for special community functions. She finds retirement rewarding and is not pressured to work. She has volunteered for all of her activities because she likes people and the satisfaction she gets from the work she does. Sister loves the private convent-home setting that her Community provides. Sister appeared genuinely pleased to participate in the study. She recommended one subject for the study.

Participant #3 (Jim)

Jim is an Assistant Vice President for a branch of a large metropolitan bank. He is 65 years old and has been a banker for the past 41 years. He married late

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in life and has two young adult daughters. His oldest daughter, Linda, was evaluated and found to be "autistic" as a young child. She attended special school programs during her childhood. Now at the age of 24 she still lives at home with them and attends a special program for adults with special needs. Jim's youngest daughter lives in her own apartment in a neighboring community and visits sporadically.

Jim maintains that he had a carefree childhood and as a twin he was afforded special advantages, attention and companionship. His home environment provided both security and moral guidance from his parents, his father was the strong disciplinarian. As a young adult Jim enjoyed the reciprocal exchange of energy acquired from church activities. He looked forward to marriage, marrying late because he had not "found the right girl yet". With marriage, he stepped into a different world from the one he had known with the birth of a handicapped child. The difficulties and disappointments weighed heavily upon him over the years.

Jim is a dynamic individual. He is successful in his career and continues to be active in church work, in civic activities, and in special organizations that

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service the needs of the handicapped. After the interview Ed was going to attend a leadership meeting at his church.

Participant #4 (Bob)

Bob is a 74 year old retired construction foreman of Italian descent. He has been married to his second wife, Susanne, for 15 years. They reside in a rural garden-apartment complex. Bob has one grown son from his first marriage.

Bob was a widower and a single parent for about 12 years after his first wife suffered a massive stroke at the age of 46, leaving him with their 10 year old son, Paul. Bob believed that his earlier church affiliations had kept him "off the street" and, "you have to get some good out of it." He wanted the same for Paul. Bob shopped for a church until he found one with activities similar to those he had participated in during his youth. In retrospect, he believes that he made the right decision because Paul is a college graduate and now teaches.

Bob remarried when Paul was about 22 years old. His marriage to Susanne, a teacher, was the result of his family's clandestine matchmaking efforts. Bob is 14 years older than his second wife. Now that he is

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retired and she works, his life revolves around her and he even enjoys doing a lot of the home chores. Baby sitting, frequent visits from Bob's grand-children, and family get-togethers are the priorities in their lives as Paul and his family live nearby.

Bob, a dark complected, short stocky man with dark grey hair wore a red sweater vest over a plaid sport shirt and casual slacks on the day of the interview. He smiled and gestured as he entered the room while saying that he had been thinking of things to tell me about and hoped to be of help. He needed no encouragement to verbalize his thoughts, spoke incessantly about his past and verbalized his enjoyment of reminiscing. He spoke honestly about sadness in reminiscences which he feels is part of the human experience. Bob believes that it is how we deal with those "sours" that counts. Since one of Bob's sisters died three months ago, Bob said that he focuses his reminiscences on the good times that he had with family members who have deceased instead of the loss. He encourages family members to do the same when their reminiscences evoke sad feelings. Bob says that his strategy works. The talk then focuses on reminiscences

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of fun times shared together and spirits are uplifted. He recommended one subject.

Participant #5 (Ruth)

Ruth is a 73 year old grandmother who lives with her husband of 44 years in their own home. Ruth is a fair, attractive woman of medium build who was meticulously groomed. She wore a soft grey two piece pants suit and trendy, large, square, multicolored earrings that seemed the perfect accessory. Her skin was soft and smooth without many age lines. Her hair was a sandy brown color with a lot of golden highlights, worn in a short, full casual style. Ruth was soft spoken. She smiled a lot and laughed out loud at herself as she talked about her anticipation of the interview.

Ruth had been a baccalaureate prepared nurse who enjoyed a colorful ten year career in nursing before her retirement to start a family. She now has three adult sons who are married and five grand-children. Ruth was referred for the study by her daughter-in-law. Prior to providing the description of reminiscence in this study, Ruth said that she had separated her memories into two categories. Reminiscences referred to her remote memories, and more recent past events and

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experiences were just memories. Ruth has "memory boxes" explaining:

all the things I want to remember, I put them there...I put my life into boxes...then occasionally I'll take them out and I'll remember all those times...the old ones are back in the head, whereas the new ones now I put into a box....I visually want to see these things....Then I take it all out and have a wonderful time just thinking about all those things.

Ruth wanted to participate because she still loves the memories of her training days and work experiences.

Ruth said, "I always loved learning." She has a deep respect for knowledge. She was pleased to participate in the study because it seemed to provide her with a sense of connectedness to her nursing career. Her memories of those days are happy ones, as her voice and facial expression often reflected the emotional tone connected with the reminiscences.

Participant # 6 (Helen)

Helen is a 74 year old widow who still lives in the original two family home that she grew-up in that has been owned by her family for more than fifty years. The only difference is that now, she lives there alone.

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Helen is very plain, yet, attractive and quite personable. Her hair was a light brown color, simply styled, reflecting minimal pampering. Her skin was smooth and clear. She wore no glasses, and seemed to be of normal weight for her medium height. On the evening of the interview she wore black slacks and a grey sweater with no other accessories.

Helen said, "I don't like to reminisce. I do reminisce but, I don't like to make a habit of it." When asked if she could tell me more about her feelings she skirted the issue and shared reminiscences relating to her family: her parents, her children, and her grand-children. She related parenting experiences. As the mother of twins, some are unique. The responsibilities of raising her four children alone were burdensome. She spoke of her husband wistfully with a sense of the unfairness of his untimely death after developing lung cancer at the age of 37. It was obvious from her remarks that it was a great personal loss. From her tone of voice, I sensed the anger, sadness and loneliness not articulated but clearly present in spite of her effort to masque them.

Her reminiscences provided glimpses of the spirituality present in her life. Helen is actively

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involved with church volunteer work and does keep very busy by helping others. All but one of Helen's children live near-by. Although they have "their own lives", she does see them often. She recommended one subject.

Participant #7 (May)

May is 84 years old and remarkably young looking for her age. She is short and slim, wears light colored framed eye glasses and has short curly light brown colored hair. On the day of the interview she wore a paisley print stirrup pant outfit with a matching sweatshirt and gold jewelry. She has been widowed from her first husband of 35 years for 23 years, and has been divorced from her second husband after three years of marriage for 15 years. She has five children, two boys and three girls who are all alive and well. Only one son lives out of state and she does not see him often. Although her other children live within reasonable traveling distance, she always speaks to them all several times each week by phone. May has 11 grand-children and two great-grand-children and surrounds herself with their presence by nests of their pictures she has on display in her apartment.

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May lives alone in a large three room apartment and takes care of all of her own personal business. She said that she reminisces "a lot" because that's "all I have to do" and she enjoys it. She said that she spends a lot more time alone in the winter because the weather keeps her in. Her apartment is located near a small shopping mall where she goes to get her hair done and can pick up food items conveniently. But she doesn't venture out for long distances alone as much as she used to. She can rely on her children to take her wherever she needs to go.

May was referred to the study by participant #5. She readily agreed to participate and began the interview with a vivid recall of remote experiences from her childhood. The reminiscences she shared seemed to be sequentially ordered and chronologically narrated spanning her entire life. May honestly categorized happy memories from sad ones acknowledging that both exist. In spite of the remoteness of some sad memories recalled, the sadness returned and her voice quivered as she told them to me. She said, "When sad thoughts come to me they stay for a while", and she finds it difficult to change the mood experienced. Her happy memories give her great satisfaction but are

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mixed with nostalgia over the passing of time and life. May told her life story through her reminiscences with dignity and pride.

Participant #8 (Alice)

Alice is a short, plump woman, a friendly, grandmotherly type with short white hair, who believes that her life was as rich and full as it was filled with the unpredictable as the mother of six children. Alice has been a widow for two years and still lives in the private home she shared with her husband of 47 years. After being alone for six months, she invited one of her sons to move back home with her when he was laid off from work, and he did. In spite of his situation, she finds his presence comforting.

Recently Alice celebrated her 75th birthday. Instead of being thrilled with the surprise party given by her children, she said that she was ambivalent about the whole thing because had her husband lived, the calendar would have marked their 50th wedding anniversary that same week.

Alice and her husband were just plain "family folks" and shared parenting responsibilities. She believes that their compatibility was due to complementary personalities. Her husband, Tom, was

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particular, precise, a perfectionist. She was easy-going, and the mediator of all disputes. Tom was a deeply religious man who lived his beliefs in his daily life. They were deeply devoted to each other.

When I arrived for the interview, I was warmly greeted. Alice is plain, gentle, calm and caring. She said that she reminisces a lot, actually making the rounds of pictures throughout her living room every morning. No matter what the topic of her reminiscences were, she always came back to memories of Tom, and she became teary eyed during the interview. As far as she is concerned, her life was a good one with few sorrows. Nothing has been as hard for her to endure as his loss. Alice reminisces a lot with her children when they are together for dinner. When Alice reminisces she now sees that all the work was worth it. She sees many of her husband's qualities in her children and this pleases her.

The Interview

Initially, one individual, who met the inclusion criteria, was approached by the researcher and the study design was implemented. The other participants were referred. After obtaining informed consent and completing the demographic data sheet, participants

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were interviewed. Four of the interviews were conducted in the participant's own home. One interview was conducted in the researcher's home, and three interviews were conducted in other mutually agreed upon locations that afforded privacy and quiet. Prior to conducting the scheduled interview, the researcher wanted to "break the ice." She engaged the participant in small talk for a short time to put him/her at ease and to establish the base for a trusting relationship. Initially, the participants seemed somewhat uncomfortable and unsure of just what to say. Most participants made comments such as "I hope I'm giving you what you want" or sought reassurance in questions such as "Is this what you want?" "Is this OK ?" Following some reassurance, most settled into the interview. The length of the interviews ranged from one hour to three hours.

Vera was the first subject identified by the researcher. She readily agreed to participate and the interview was conducted in her home. The participant was asked to describe what it is like, how she feels when she has reminisced, and what effects she attributes to it. The researcher was prepared to record fieldnotes simultaneously. The unique

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interpersonal nature and spontaneity with which the personal memories and experiences were being recalled required the researcher's undivided attention. Fieldnotes were recorded immediately after the interview. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim as were all of the interviews conducted.

Throughout the interview process Vera was open and expressed her thoughts as well as her feelings related to her reminiscences. She is aware of the emotional tone of her memories and deals with unpleasant ones by telling herself to just let them go, to forget them because nothing can change the facts. She said, "You just can't help thinking of things when you're alone. But sometimes I get a little blue. I usually try not to let things get me down anyway, let's put it that way, what for, what for. Reminiscing helps me." Then she purposely remembers, "I was in love. I did have my good times." She feels that she has had more of them anyway and a lot to be thankful for. Vera enjoys reminiscing about happy times more with her oldest sister than with anyone else and said that the children don't always want to listen to what happened a long time ago, but they do.

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The probes developed to structure and elicit information during the interview were used by the researcher (Appendix C.). The data analysis of the first interview reflected the participant's impulse to reminisce and the narrative style used to recall significant events and experiences from her past. Instead of enhancing the flow of information the probes blocked it. The interjection of probes interrupted the continuity of the reminiscences diminishing the richness of the interview data. The probes were inhibiting, providing too much structure and a quantitative tone not congruent with a qualitative research design. Since only one interview was conducted no changes were made and the second interview was scheduled with the next participant.

The participant's home was the natural setting for the second interview. Sister Mary began the interview saying:

I think about my early days alone. I rarely have told anyone about my early life or my thoughts about them. I just don't feel that I want anyone to know those things. They are very private to me. I told very few people about this, but, I want you to know, so I did jot down a few things I

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think about a lot. I think they are important for you to know.

She came to the interview with notes on index cards in a determined effort to provide constructive data for the study. Once again the probes were used by the researcher. The data analysis indicated that the participant's communication was either blocked or redirected by the probes. At one point the participant did not even respond to one of the probes interjected by the researcher. She said:

I couldn't bear to think of my poor Stephen with AIDs. He was so young, he had so much to do.

Their life is so different from my life. The life I grew up in was a very sheltered life. But think of what the poor youngsters have to face today.

That was really difficult for me.

"Did you ever share it with the other sisters?," asked the researcher. There was no response. Pause. Then the participant continued, "That was in November, and then in March, they called my sister-in-law and told her that he would only have three to four months left."

One explanation for the communication barrier was found in the data analysis. The probe was out of context. It did not fit into the participant's

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narrative. Later she repeated, "You asked me when I told the other sisters." The question was answered when it did fit into her story's context. Besides, the participant's private feelings had not been shared before and she needed to unburden them to a trusting individual, using her notes to remain focused, and in control.

Another explanation is that the form of reminiscence used fits the phases of reminiscence described by Mirriam (1980), selection, immersion, withdrawal and closure. This participant was immersed in her thoughts, blocking all incoming stimuli, and continued with her narrated reminiscences to the conclusion of the story. From the analysis emerged a structure to the reminisced narratives that would be observed in subsequent interview data transcripts. This was the beginning, middle and conclusion to each experience recalled and the basic need on the part of the participant to articulate that experience to its conclusion without an interruption.

The researcher discussed the findings from the initial interviews with the committee chair. He suggested that the researcher consider not using the probes in the next interview and just see what would

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happen. In subsequent interviews the probes would be limited to participants who were reticent about articulating reminiscences and needed a stimulus for continued dialogue.

The third participant, Bob, and the fourth and fifth participants, Jim, and Ruth were key informants. They literally came to the interview prepared to contribute, and shared their reminiscences freely. Bob and Ruth demonstrated the keenest sense of humor of all the participants and Jim seemed to be the most serious.

Each of these interviews was not conducted in the participant's home but in another convenient location that afforded privacy and quiet. Jim's interview was conducted in the researcher's home. During the interview Jim was relaxed and spoke freely about his experiences of reminiscing. He tried hard to articulate the feelings he experiences relating to reminiscing. At one point when he was pressured to elaborate, he said that he could not express some feelings because he thinks that we just do not have the "vocabulary". He continued to search for the words to describe the feelings but believed the feelings were "inner feelings in a nonphysical dimension."

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Bob's interview was conducted in a campus meeting room where the researcher is employed. The room provided comfort and privacy. Bob was an enthusiastic participant arriving early for the interview appointment. Ruth's interview was conducted in her daughter-in-law's home at Ruth's request. Her daughter-in-law had referred her to the researcher. The setting was comfortable and private, and Ruth was at ease.

The questions to be asked during the interviews evolved through the dialogue as the participants were articulate and perceptive and the data to be collected emerged in the process. Fieldnotes were recorded after the interviews. Data analysis indicated that an unstructured interview approach seemed to work. The participants reminisced freely providing the researcher with rich data related to the phenomena of reminiscence as new themes emerged and others were supported.

The sixth participant, Helen, was referred to the study by participant # 2. She called me and agreed to participate saying that she was available for an interview in her home any evening of the week. It was unexpected then, that she was so guarded and anxious the evening of the interview. Some of her anxiety was

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related to being tape recorded. When I shared the fact that I really don't like being taped either, we both laughed and that seemed to put her at ease. But, in spite of pleasurable chit-chat initially, she gestured nervously and spoke very quickly during the interview. She had told me on the phone that she does not like to reminisce, but does. Her reticence to talk about those feelings became obvious because she spoke superficially about them, but changed her mood dramatically when the reminiscences revolved around her earlier life, her children and her grand-children; then she laughed and smiled and gestured, pointing to pictures while reminiscing. She recalled how she and her children enjoy rereading her mother's old letters sent during a European vacation, and how they reminisce about fun-filled past holidays spent together. But her mood fluctuated from enjoyment of happy reminiscences to sadness when they were linked to the memories of her husband. The interview probes were used to expand on her responses, and in an unguarded moment she said, "I said that I don't like to reminisce. I do reminisce, but, I don't like to make a habit of it. What I mean is I really think you have to keep going, I prefer to

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keep going, I don't like to go back." "Can you tell me more about those feelings?", asked the researcher.

Well, first of all, I lost my husband 24 years ago and I don't want to go back and keep thinking about losing him. It was nice having the children but it was sad being alone and being, just bringing them up by myself. So, I like to keep going on. I don't want to go back and think of the years I lost him. Reminiscing is sad, in spite of some happy times along the way. I really try not to think about my past. Well if you do, you would be sad all the time, going back in the past.

"Is there a way you can keep from reminiscing?," asked the researcher. "I keep busy", Helen answered. "Well, I keep going all day. You can't help it when you're outside sweeping the leaves or ironing, that's when your mind keeps going, you know, then -pause- you can think of all kinds of things." The probes provided the turning point in this interview. As a result Helen shared her private reminiscences, expressing feelings she had not articulated before. Her interview was the most difficult one conducted due to her reticence to articulate, but the data obtained were significant.

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May, the seventh and oldest participant seemed to have conducted a life review in preparation for the interview. She said, "You know, I'm 84 years old. I made some notes because I'm afraid I might forget something important. I hope to be of help." Her apartment provided a natural setting for the interview and probes were used for clarification of information and the questions asked came from the participant's reminisced narratives. Besides narrating her life history, her reminiscences included historical events that impacted on her personally. She spoke of "the depression" and how that kept her from marrying, "because our families wouldn't let us because they needed our salaries to help out. We had to wait five years." May's reminiscences were chronologically presented, included the personal impact of historical events, spanned eight decades and concluded with the verbalization of satisfaction with the way everything turned out. Data analysis provided support for themes previously identified, and noted May's correlation of historical events with significant personal events.

The eighth participant, Alice, thoroughly enjoyed the whole interview experience in spite of the fact that she did evoke such strong feelings of sadness

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while reminiscing about her husband that she cried, "I miss him so much." Probes were used to refocus when Alice regained her composure, but she was articulate and introspective and picked up where she had left off and continued reminiscing. The participant was comfortable and relaxed as her home was the natural setting for the interview. The reminiscences flowed freely as she seemed to be surrounded with memories. Fieldnotes were subsequently recorded. The data analysis reflected themes previously identified, with less and less new information provided. The researcher concluded that saturation had occurred and ended the data collection with this interview.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with the first two participants after the limitations related to the use of the probes were identified. There were numerous communication blocks, the interview seemed like a question and answer session. The data lacked depth. These participants were contacted by telephone; a second interview was requested. The researcher requested clarification of information. Both participants agreed to the second interview. The follow-up interviews were conducted as per study design. Probes used to keep the conversation flowing

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came from the participants' data adding information, clarifying earlier questions or relating to new themes. Sister Mary spoke of her mother, and at length about other convent life experiences. Themes of loss prevailed. Vera told stories about her childhood in the second interview, while her first interview was focused on her marriage and her children. Self acceptance and resolution remained her dominant themes.

In summary, the adaption of an unstructured interview approach after the second interview led to the articulation of personally narrated reminiscences in a story form, as sequences of significant life course encounters by all of the participants. Fieldnotes recorded after the interviews prevented diversion of attention, maintained the strong interpersonal relationship that was developing between the participant and the researcher needed to capture the essence of the experience. Follow-up interviews with the first two participants address the described limitations and enriched the data collection process.

Analysis of Findings

This study was designed to explicate the meaning of reminiscence for well elderly individuals who live in the community. The data were examined to determine

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the process and style of reminiscence, the context of the life stories which includes the physical, social and temporal environments in which reminiscences occur, its substance, and the subjective feelings of the participants. The context of reminiscence literally means meshing, combining and weaving together the threads of one's past life through one's memories. Its subtle, interpenetrating characteristics convey an association that is continuously reciprocal as individuals are constantly influenced by their life experiences and environments as their reminiscences portray.

The interview transcripts were reviewed line by line and paragraph by paragraph in order to understand how the participants used the process of reminiscence and what it does for them. Through reminiscence the psyche can remain intact as the self is reconstructed in a form that is acceptable. The form used to reminisce was the narrative. Some of the narratives revolved around the "Novum", an unusual happening in the life of the participant that was emotionally charged, and for some participants, it seemed to become central in his or her life over time, reflecting a turning point. For some participants' inner resources

Rem

served as a catalyst for the strength to engage in the risk, not to evade it as they struggled to achieve a balanced sense of self. The process of reminiscence can be used to validate the life trajectory.

Reminiscence can be viewed as a window to look back through with separate but integrated sets of operations, one for retrieval and one for interpretation. By looking back, the past is reflected on. The self is seen as it is and based on what is known, meaning may be attached to the reminiscence.

Due to the narrated nature of the reminisced life stories, as the interview data were reviewed by the researcher, three individuals having expertise working with the aging population were asked to review the data. This constituted a change from the original research design. Their conclusions regarding the data interpretation and the themes they identified concurred with the researchers findings. Validation of the data interpretation by individuals who work with this population substantiate the data interpretation.

When data saturation occurred, the participants' themes were recorded and plotted after careful study and tedious re-examination. This process was a lengthy one due to the general nature of the themes.

Rem

Eventually, it resulted in the development of categories. The categories were studied carefully and subsequently they were synthesized into theoretical categories and subcategories that were abstracted and illustrated and are outlined in Table 2.

TABLE 2 THE CONTEXT OF REMINISCENCE

Major Theoretical Categories and Subcategories

Life-Story Trajectory

Affirmer

Negater

Despairer

Narratives of the-Novum

Life-Gain

Life-Loss

Life-Stage Change

A Leaving-of-Legacies

Personal Properties

A Generational Transmission of Values

A Lifetime of Memories

A Making-of-Spiritual-Links

Church Connections

Personal Beliefs

Ministering Missions

Rem

Four theoretical categories emerged: the "Life-Story Trajectory" with subcategories, Affirming style/Affirmers, Negating style/Negaters, and Despairing style/Despairers; "Narratives of the-Novum" with subcategories, Life-Gain, Life-Loss and Life-Stage Change; a "Leaving-of-Legacies" with subcategories, Personal Properties, a Generational Transmission of Values, and a Lifetime of Memories; and a "Making-of-Spiritual-Links" with subcategories, Church Connections, Personal Beliefs, and Ministering Missions.

The first category, Life-Story Trajectory, synthesizes themes that reflected how the participants played out their own needs over their life course. It comprises a continuum of three divergent trajectory pathways adapting Fallot's framework (1976), in which story styles of reminiscence are used to categorize; an Affirming style of story presentation characterizing Affirmers as individuals whose life story has demonstrated an ongoing general sense of self-acceptance, a Negating style in which the Negaters distance themselves from negative life experience; and a Despairing style in which individuals who are

Rem

Despairers, are aware of and/or are preoccupied with past negative, conflict-laden issues.

The data indicate that reminiscing does not guarantee an emotional tone associated with pleasure. On the contrary, reminiscences can be associated with memories of human suffering and the struggle that ensued. Sadness or other disturbing feelings, varying in degrees of intensity and emotional tone, may return during the process.

The second theoretical category, Narratives of the-Novum, is a synthesis of narrative themes, strikingly new, unusual, happenings that were experienced by participants. For some participants a Novum seemed to evolve into a central issue over time as reverberations occurred. The subcategories, life-gain, life-loss, life-stage change were explicated from the narratives. The randomness of life is reflected in the narratives of the-Novum, the essence of the life fabric.

The third theoretical category, a Leaving-of-Legacies, evolved from themes of connectedness, and refers to tangible or intangible links, as personal property, a generational transmission of values, or a lifetime of memories that may provide a transcendent

Rem

feeling of continuation reflected through reminiscences.

The fourth category, Making-of-Spiritual-Links, is a synthesis of themes that related to the spiritual domain, such as personal beliefs, references to God, or to the church ministry in the reminiscences of the participants. Subcategories are church connections, personal beliefs, and ministering missions.

In summary, reminiscences consist of the individual's life story, a framework for a life review. The narrated data obtained through reminiscing afford an opportunity to view the elderly developmentally, and to see the range of experiences and expectations within which they have lived, and to provide a perspective from which to understand their lives; to validate their life trajectory, and the meaning of reminiscence.

Fallot's (1976) descriptions of three life story styles provide the base for categorizing the participants' dominant pattern of life story style in the first theoretical category, the Life-Story Trajectory. The second theoretical category, Narratives of the-Novum, provides the essence of the participants' life story fabric. The Leaving-of-Legacies identifies the participants' generational

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accomplishments or the symbols of everlastingness, their endowment to humanity. The Making-of-Spiritual-Links are the inner resources available for choice but fate and luck impact on the destiny of life's journey.

Major Theoretical Category

Life-Story Trajectory

"As human beings, we are all scientists of the life course. Our discoveries, while not usually shared with a community of fellow scientists, are singularly important for our own lives" (Chiriboga, 1979, p. 4). Aging is a complex, multidimensional, life-long process, and each individual brings to it a unique history as life experiences are subjective and different from anyone else's. Each one's voice has its own distinctive sound, its own particular concerns which accounts for our divergent life trajectories.

Over a life time there are some positive and some negative experiences which are often referred to as highs and lows. Most of us are prone to them regardless of gene or gender. Some of them built up confidence and polished our self image while others tore it down. Some experiences were the result of the hand of fate and others were freely chosen but all impacted on the direction of the path we take in life.

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To find out who we are today and to what degree we shaped our own destiny, we may want to examine past experiences. Reminiscences can be conceptualized as windows through which one can "look at one's-self" and see what the nature of life is and how we are able to deal with it, or simply, as an archaeological journey to a remote site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that we remember, now. For some participants' personality attributes, inner resources such as hope, courage, control, commitment and resilience served as a catalyst for the strength sustaining the momentum for their passage. The participants' trajectories traced through their narrated stories are distinctly unique.

The styles of recounting one's story were identified by Fallot (1976) as the Affirming style/Affirmer, the Negating style/Negater, and the Despairing style/Despairer. He defined the life story as the cognitive portrayal of one's autobiography. Included are all of the concrete, real life happenings, personal interpretations, and impact, which are singularly important for the elderly as they try to make sense out of their past.

Rem

From the participants' reminiscences we can hear their own voices, trace their own trajectories, determine their predominant life story styles, categorizing them as Affirmers, Negaters or Despairers. Fallot's Affirming style of recounting one's story is defined as follows:

In the Affirming style, the Affirmer exhibits a general sense of self-acceptance in both positive and negative experiences. Stories are more organized than those of the Negaters or Despairers, show greater stability of self-representation, use more private explanations, and have a consistent internal locus of control.

Locus of control has been identified as a variable that describes the degree to which individuals perceive that they are able to control life events (Rotter, 1975).

Locus of control seems to be a stable view of why events take place. If events are perceived to be contingent on an individual's own behavior, the control is viewed as internal (Rotter, 1975). This trait seems central for Fallot who concludes that the

Affirmer is characterized by the realization that the stance or "attitude" one assumes relative to the past is of primary importance and it is mostly

Rem

positive (p. 28).

In this study, Vera, Bob, May and Alice were designated as Affirmers. The dominant characteristics of Fallot's Affirming story style presentation were reflected in their reminiscences. Vera reminisced about difficult times during different stages of her life. She dialogued about her attitude towards reminiscing which triggered spontaneous reminiscences reflecting childhood struggles. The positive and negative aspects of her childhood experiences and later life were presented with a stable self representation. She said:

I like to reminisce, yes. I think it's good for me. You know we had some bad times as kids growing up. We didn't have much after my dad lost his job. It wasn't his fault, he was a good man but it was the times. Women didn't go out to work then, my mother wasn't able to help that way. I didn't get my own dress, you know what I mean, a new one until I was 16, it was always hand-me-downs. We made do. We were hungry but happy I always say, but that's over now. But, I think it really brought us closer to each other, do you know what I mean? I know it sounds crazy

Rem

but for a long time, we were all we had. It made us better, I think sometimes when I think about it. We had value for things.

Vera's memories provided a view of her childhood, and family hardships as a result of harsh economic conditions. The richness of her life was in the relationships she had which provided the support and courage for dealing with it. And she did. An antecedent of hope is connectedness with others. Hers was provided by family bonds. Looking back now, she seems to have a sense of optimism that personal growth comes through struggle.

As she continued to narrate her life story, the reminiscences of her adult years focused on her husband, Benny, and later in the interview she asked:

Did I tell you I was married twice? Benny was my second husband. I divorced my first husband and that was the best thing I ever did. We were very young but one day he pushed me and I saw his other side. No one in the family had ever separated before, but my sisters stayed with me all the way.

Vera's past behavior reveals her resourcefulness; the control, and choices freely made, and her adjustment to

Rem

the change which may have given her a new sense of self acceptance. Then she continued:

Benny was my life, he was full of fun. I still miss him....It's twelve years since he passed away....I can't believe it. It's a long time. I still go to the cemetery as often as I can. It's not as often as it used to be but I feel close to him when I go there. Do you know it's like a visit. I feel close to him. Then I remember all the good times. I need it sometimes. Some people can't understand how I can do that. They think it's morbid. But, I'm going as often as I can. I don't care what anybody says. I miss him. He was such a good man. Do you know I'm a different person when I come home. When I come home I feel good. A euphoria comes over me and I'm good for a while. But that's life, that's the way it goes. I missed him a lot. I used to reminisce about the card games we had ever Friday night. The different places we went together, family and friends. It's sad, it's sad. We were always with family and friends. I guess that's what got me through but, you have to go on with your life.

Rem

And, Vera said she felt that she had "gotten used to a living alone." "It was hard for me for a while, but, I'm OK." By saying that she is "OK", she implied that overall, she has been able to maintain a positive outcome although, her reminiscences stir up past sad memories from time to time which need to be dealt with again. Over time she has found ways of dealing with them, such as her visits to the cemetery, which are less frequent now, and in the future, she can use her resources to her advantage. From her reminiscences some important turning points were revealed such as her divorce, her remarriage, and then the sudden death of her second husband as well as her adaptability to widowhood. Her self-acceptance in both her negative and positive experiences were exemplified through reminiscences relating to different stages of her life. An example of her self-acceptance in negative experiences was portrayed in the story of harsh childhood struggles. Self-acceptance in positive experiences was reflected in stories about happier times shared with her children. These examples characterize her as an Affirmer, the Affirming life story style is evident in her reminiscences.

Rem

Bob insightfully related reminiscences from some developmental stages of his life, demonstrating his ability to deal with the complexities and paradoxes of his life that began in his childhood. His positiveness prevailed over time; his life story style was predominantly Affirming. He said:

And I was reminiscing, to be honest with you, when I think of when I was a child -- my mother died when I was nine and we were seven children. She died in childbirth. At that time when you died, you had the coffin in the house. And I was only a child of nine. And I remember until today -- in fact I used to get nightmares after that -- I could see my mother in the coffin with two candles on each side and we're sitting on a windowsill. And I always used to think of that. In fact, even today I think of it, but now I don't think of it as a nightmare. I think of it as my mother, and I can look at it good now, but before, I just couldn't think about that.

Personal resilience seemed to be operational at an early age. Bob's reminiscences from a later life stage provided continued evidence of his strength after coping with another personal sorrow:

Rem

And then when I grew up, you know, this is part of life, and I remember my wife died. And I was always afraid that when I met Sue, I always tell her, how is Paul going to accept her? Will he accept her like I accepted my stepmother? And I was afraid. Suppose he doesn't like her. Suppose--"What are you doing taking my mother's place." And I spoke to Paul one time about her. He says, "Look Dad, I want what's good for you. Whatever hang-up you had with your stepmother, that's your problem. You've gotta settle it." But he says, "You marry Sue, you marry her. You got my blessing." But I was so frightened you know. What if he took my thoughts, my feelings, "How could somebody take my mother's place?" And this was always the thing. Now that you know, how could a man survive?

Refocusing on childhood again, Bob's ability to accept challenge at a turning point in his life, to take control, and resolve conflict through honest introspective reflections was confirmed:

My stepmother...we never really accepted her. Never. My father had two children by her, a boy and a girl. And the boy was very attached to our

Rem

side of the family, but the girl was attached to the mother. And I couldn't see that at the time. But now I could see, why not? In fact, we 're very good friends, now, my sister Ruth and I, because we helped my brother, Fred, her brother-- my stepbrother. Fred---died, you know, about four years ago. She was in Maryland and I had to get in touch with her and tell her that Fred is dying and come, you know, if you can. We became very close now. And the day we had her at my house, like get to talking, call it reminiscing or whatever you call it--I just said, "Put your cards on the table." And we did give my stepmother a rough time and she was talking about it, and I said, "Now look, Ruth, I did a lot of things when I was a kid that I'm very ashamed of, myself, but I can't go back. I can't make them over, so let's you and I pick up from this day on." And sure enough, that's what we've done. We're just like brother and sister--never had a problem in our life. We visit each other. In fact I had her over to the house two weeks ago. Flexibility and adaptability seem to be inherent in his nature which help maintain continuity of the self.

Rem

In his own way Bob sincerely tried to explain how he manages to maintain his balance:

Well, I don't know about dealing with it. I think I've been very fortunate all my life to deal with something, I mean, I might be down for a while and everything, you know, but I seem to deal with whatever there is. Maybe it's not the best situation, but I know you can't sit back and feel sorry for yourself. And you can't always think of the happy things, or the happy times. You've got to think a little -- like I say, it's always nice to be happy, but you have to have some tears in-between to appreciate your happiness. Otherwise you're just living a life that you have made up.

Having a realistic outlook on life, experiencing losses and satisfactorily adjusting afterwards, Bob's stamina is reflected in his reminiscences.

Bob's inner strength was first realized as a child as he recovered from the loss of his mother. He seems to reflect increasing strength over the years as other losses occur. Finally, one can see his attitude as he tried to share his positive methods and outlook on life.

My sister, she died in Texas. I went down and

Rem

buried her....So, like, you have to think of those things at that time. But, then when you come out, you've got to forget them. You've got to leave them there. You've got to start thinking of the present things of today and tomorrow. Cause my sister met--her husband when he was in the service, and she married him, and then she died, and I went down to bury her, you know. And I had a lot of bad memories of her, you know, in the army, you know. But, I think I can get back to reality, like I say. You have to cry, you have to mourn. Go right back.

Being able to relinquish feelings of loss allowed him to find meaning in present experiences. After sharing his thoughts, Bob continued on with this topic providing insight into his use of reminiscence, and it seemed to work. He told about reminiscing to escape something frightening and then being able to manage what has to be done here and now are the traits reflected.

See you have to learn how to deal with the other side, not always happy. Have to learn how to deal with sorrow, pain, nothing works out, hard luck, you know. And I think that's what got me

Rem

through the army sometimes, you know. Through the jungle sometimes at night when you're fighting like hell--every noise you hear you think that the enemy is behind you, you know. And your mind wanders...and you put yourself somewhere else. We all reminisce, all of us do, you know. We always like to think sometimes, sometimes I think it's an escape. You know. You don't want to face --- there's so much here, you start reminiscing, and then you come back to reality and you sort of take care of whatever you've got to take care of that before was so horrible. I think people reminisce sometimes when they're afraid and there is something that frightens them, and they are so disgusted or something. They just want to think of something good.

At this point Bob used a quote to summarize his feelings:

Like in the Bible, "There's a time for mourning and a time for sorrow, and a time for tears, a time for smiling, laughing," and that's what it is. But you always have to reminisce too, to enjoy everything else with it. And you have to reminisce. I really think so. You have to

Rem

reminisce about the good days and the bad days. You have to remember when you start reminiscing, you have to look at today. That's what you've got to work on. But that helps you survive today and gets over to the next day. That's how I look at it.

Bob's insight reflects a balanced perspective from his life experiences as well as inner strength, and emotional stamina, stable self representation and inner locus of control by his own actions and behavior that did bring about positive change. Bob did remarry and positively change his life after the death of his first wife. He used humor to change the mood of family members when they became sad over memories of a deceased sibling, and he gave his family sound advice for dealing with loss. Bob is predominantly an Affirmer. His reminiscences reveal characteristics of an Affirming life story style; the acceptance of his past with both positive and negative experiences. Some that were narrated were: fun had with siblings versus the loss of his mother; the tragic death of his first wife and the joy of his only son; traditional holiday celebrations and the "sours" of another loss. Bob's

Rem

past was judged as enjoyable on its own merits, and his attitude was positive.

May's reminiscences spanned eight decades and the stories told reflected an Affirming style in spite of the developmental progression of difficult life experiences she encountered. She said:

I had a happy life with my children and my husband, but I started out life quite differently; my father died when I was about two years old, and my mother being widowed and having come over from Italy only a short time before that, didn't speak the language, so she had to get out and work to support us. She couldn't find anybody to take care of me the way she wanted me to be taken care of, so she put me in a boarding school. I went in there when I was four years old....They never took anyone so young before, but because of the circumstances they took me that young. They didn't put me in the classroom with the other children. I used to be with the sisters....and spent time with them until I was old enough to go into the classroom, and I was there for ten years. But I got used to it. I would feel very lonely when I would go home for vacations, and then I

Rem

spent time with my family, my cousins and aunts and uncles, and then I would go back to school. I'd be very lonely. I'd feel, I wish I were back home. But the time went by. Ten years went by and I got out of the school and lived with my mother, just the two of us.

The death of her father was a significant turning point in May's life as a long, lonely childhood was accepted and it passed, but the sad, sterile experience was well remembered. Her thoughts were filled with hope, an end to the loneliness, and a wish to be at home with her mother at last.

And then May's reminiscences focused on her young adult experiences as her stories validated the review of her life:

I went to work when I got out of high school. I supported her at that time. I worked in the bank, and I liked my work, and that's where I met my husband, and, of course, times were bad. It was during the depression, and we couldn't get married, because our families didn't want us to get married. Things were too bad for us to get married. We had to help out in the family, so we kept company for about five years. Finally we got

Rem

married.

Marriage was a phase that was most fulfilling. It reflected her commitment as well as the actualization of her earlier hopes and the ongoing struggles.

And I had a very happy, very happy home, until the children grew up. When the children grew up I felt so useless. I felt nobody needed me anymore. So I said to my husband, "I'm going to get a job." He said, "Who's going to take you, you haven't worked for 27 years. How are you going to get a job?" I went out the next day and got a job. And, I loved it. I enjoyed it. I was able to come home at a reasonable time and shop and cook and take care of the home, and the children. I think three of them were already married. And everything was great.... We had a wonderful life, until my husband became very ill, and he died suddenly of lung cancer.

May's happy, quiet life was "shattered" by the sudden death of her husband. Dealing with this turning point, she sifted through the debris in search for the pieces to put it all back together again. She reminisced:

I was home with just my youngest, and that was quite a blow. I thought it just shattered my life

Rem

completely. It was something--nobody expects these things to happen. And here I am with this big house where eight of us lived, and we were two of us left. I can't stay here. It's impossible. So I sold my house and moved into an apartment.

After my husband's death my life was very different. Very different. I was alone. And you know, we had a lot of friends. But, somehow when a woman is left alone, the friends are not the same when, you know, when you are all couples. Suddenly you're alone. You're a fifth wheel, you know. It just doesn't work the same. In the beginning it was hard because we did a lot together. It's terribly lonely but by now after all these years, I'm on my own and you can do it. When my husband was alive he paid all the bills. After his death, it was so sudden. I didn't know where anything was or what was up. It was all in my husband's head. I really had some time. But after all the worry, he left me in a very comfortable position. He had his own business and eventually I sold it. And that was hard too. For a time I was unsure of what I had done but I see now that it was the best thing to do. It was hard

Rem

giving up something I knew was so important at one time but I had to finally make that decision and then live with it.

As May told these stories, her voice seemed to reflect the control she took of the situation. May's reminiscences reflected her resilience, the new foundation developing for another stage of her life. May's life seemed to be coming together again but events about which she reminisced validated the highs and lows providing a glimpse of her response to it all.

I decided to take a cruise. I used to like to take cruises once in a while. They sort of gave me a lift, I took this cruise for a week on the Oceanic, and I met this gentleman. Walter was a widower, and he had five children. I thought we had a lot in common. We spent a lot of time together....After the cruise, he wanted to continue seeing me....we kept in touch....We went out on dates....I met his family, and before I knew it, we got married.

It wasn't a very smart thing for me to do.... it was really too soon. We only knew each other three months. I should have waited, but because I thought, "We're senior citizens. We're not

Rem

getting married for love. We're getting married for companionship," and I felt that we had enough in common to get along. But for some reason or another, once we got married, that didn't happen. We had moved to Florida but, we didn't get along. He was very jealous. And I thought, "Well, you know, at our age, why should you be jealous? It isn't like when you're young." I couldn't understand it. So we separated.

May went on to say that she was "shaken" by the experience but got over it quickly but missed the "companionship" she had come to enjoy. That was the "hard part" for her. But she said, "That's over too. I'm just going to enjoy each day as it comes. I am close to my grand-children, they're adults now....good company and they come and visit often. I love them all and I know they love me. It's great." May's flexibility and adaptability indicative of her self acceptance over a long lifetime are evident from her reminiscences. May is an Affirmer. Her life story presentation reflects both positive and negative aspects of experiences without distancing herself from painful events. A strong inner locus of control prevailed over time which was consistently reflected in

Rem

her actions and behavior. This indication initially stems from May's narrative about early childhood. Although she attended a boarding school for several years, she knew that she wanted to live at home with her mother. As soon as the opportunity availed itself, she did. There are other examples of her inner locus of control, that she is self-directive. May said that she always wanted to have a large family because she was lonely as an only child. And she did. After her husband died she took control of her personal life, sold her husband's business, sought her children for support, remarried, divorced, resided alone in Florida for several years, and made her own life-style decisions carefully. Her attitude was mainly positive and the characteristics of her story style were predominantly Affirming.

Although two years have passed and Alice is still struggling to achieve balance since the death of her husband, her life story is predominantly Affirming. Alice and her husband, Tom, were married for 48 years. It is no wonder that he was the starting point for her life story. Her reminiscences began with the memories of her wedding. Marriage was perhaps the most important phase of her life. Her reminiscences then

Rem

projected backwards in time and numerous references to her husband were threaded throughout her stories. Finally the interview culminated with the here and now as she wondered about her future.

Initially she spoke of reminiscing which portrayed hope by saying that she, "feels it gives you a lot of satisfaction to see where you've gone to and what you've accomplished, and then you forget all the hard work it took to get to where you are today." These thoughts reflect the life struggles that she experienced. But she sighed and looked away and then said:

I always say, God, I don't know, we want it this way. Life is hard but you know, even moving here. We always wanted to live here. We were looking around 17th street ...a big house. We were kind of disappointed that we ended up in this house, cause you know, the condition of the house. But then you find it's a blessing in disguise. That neighborhood deteriorated so quickly, whereas we still have a chance here. So we said, there is a reason for everything. God has a reason for everything. I remember when we were looking for a house up-state and we had a car accident and we

Rem

never bought the house. I said. "Well, God had a reason." Adam, Sarah, Michael around the corner. John, Megan, all the children met their husband's right here. Lisa up the block. It all worked out well. They're happily married. They are. I'm glad we're here now. We all had bad days in our marriages, I don't care who, but just like every birth, as I said, you forget the pain. You think of the joy. So what brings me back to reality is, my God, look at all the beautiful things my husband did for everyone. I mean, even when Lisa used to leave me with her children, Tom would bake with them.

With that thought of her husband, Alice said, "I try to be realistic and say, everything comes to an end, but it's not easy. Not easy. I feel my life was very good. It's more that two years since Tom passed away. To me it seems like forever, I miss him so badly." Alice's reflections reveal her still to be resolving feelings and adapting to her personal loss. She continued to reminisce about her husband:

That's when you miss him, walking. Yea. Well, we always went out together, Tom and I right? Went to Mass together. Went marketing together,

Rem

visiting together. So when you're walking alone, I found it very hard to get around. I just felt, What am I doing I'm walking alone, alone. That's how you feel it the most. Yea. This is a sad thing to walk the streets alone. I don't enjoy walking anymore.

When trying to bring back feelings she remembered that were associated with a special day she said, "I always thank God that I met Tom. You know if I show you, even the Valentine cards, he always made his own. The last one I took out this year, because I had no more." As she continued to reminisce sharing more of her innermost feelings she said:

Missing his presence. Oh, yea. Oh sure.

Remember, what was our life? Togetherness and whatever joy we got out of life was having the children and being with them, and now they are all settled in their own ways, so it leaves me with almost nothing. So, in a way, like it's good that Peter came back and then in another way, you start to say, "I don't want that many responsibilities all over again." It's a different story. Life is changing again. It's a new chapter to my life now. I debate whether it's good or not good.

Rem

Although Alice was able to demonstrate characteristics of hardiness and hope in her 48 year marriage, the loss of her husband has most likely been the most threatening to her integration as he was her support. As this turning point brought uncertainty still to be resolved, she remained connected with other family members and with her strong spiritual beliefs. Alice's stories reflect a strong internal locus of control. She and her husband were partners collaborating in their childrearing endeavors as the parents of six children. She has remained in control making present decisions with her philosophy of life that conveys a sense of meaningfulness. Her stories reflect a strong, consistent sense of self in which she accepts both the positive and negative, life's pleasures and disappointments in like manner. She told about the time one son wouldn't attend a family gathering, the first anniversary of her husband's death. She didn't let this upset her. The whole family then decided to go to visit him. When they did they had a wonderful time together. Alice can be characterized as an Affirmer. Her predominantly affirmative reminiscences validate her affirmation of life.

Rem

Fallot's (1976) second category is the Negating style which portrays the Negater as an individual who minimizes the impact of one's life story through distancing, or with the exclusion of negative aspects of life. Fallot defines the characteristics as follows:

There are two different modes of "Negating" or "distancing" oneself from the life story telling process. The first and more common one involves a rapidly shifting, seemingly haphazard movement from one area to another. In this way the participants avoid assimilating either the content or affective impact of their life story. The other distancing mode is seen less frequently and, in contrast to the first more "action oriented" style, appears to be more "restrained".

The life story is presented in a very systematic, controlled tone. Negative aspects of the story are excluded altogether or, if noted, are spoken of in a most matter of fact way. Issues of motivation and emotion are rarely mentioned. The Negaters spend more time talking about their early home life and shift focus from self to the environment.

Rem

In this style, the stories are less organized and less explanation is used. The Negaters demonstrate less autonomy with more external locus of control evident in the stories they tell. Individuals tend to have an external locus of control if events are perceived to be contingent on chance, fate, luck, powerful others or a complex of other forces (Rotter, 1975).

Jim, Ruth and Helen reflected a predominantly Negating story style and were categorized as Negaters based on their reminiscences.

Remembering early days seemed to mean a lot to Jim because they preceded a difficult life change. Assumption of a new state in life, marriage, divided his life into phases. Life that was presented as innocent and free during childhood and youth became more confining and filled with responsibilities. Jim seemed to reminisce in a controlled, systematic manner. The negative aspects of his life, such as the mentioning of his retarded daughter, are spoken of in a matter of fact way. These aspects of his story telling style characterize him as predominantly a Negater.

I was 37 when I married....My home is different because we have an adult retarded daughter home, so we don't have the freedom to come and go as we

Rem

would like, and my past was exactly the opposite from that. We were two boys, carefree.

Jim reflected on the process of his reminiscence practices initially saying:

Usually what gets me reminiscing is an incident that happens that brings back the past into my memory and then I start thinking about what it was about and that usually trips me off --pause -- something that's usually emotional or significant like, -- ah -- if I go to a wake and I -- pause -- see people, --ah -- in sorrow, I think of the time I was at my mother's wake or my father's wake and that will bring back memories of that incident in my life. In general I feel sad. I feel sad because it's over. Their life is over. What can you do, You keep going on with your life, of course.

Remembering emotionally charged events or experiences was more the norm than the exception for Jim.

Contemporaneous sad events can trigger sad reminiscences for him. For Jim, reminiscences about his parents, and his loss indicate that he continues to have an inner struggle and unfulfilled hopes:

Well, I wish sometimes that my mother would still

Rem

be alive when I got married. She only lived 90 days after I got married and never lived to see me successful.

Pleasing his parents meant a lot to Jim and his feelings of sadness and disappointment are stirred up occasionally by some spontaneous or purposeful reminiscences. He had hoped that they could see his career accomplishments that he worked so hard for. He said:

When I became successful in life they were both dead. I feel bad about that. They could never share that experience with me, of achievement. That meant a lot to me. They couldn't enjoy my children. I'm sure there are a lot of people like that. I think it meant a lot. -- pause -- It meant a lot to make them proud. I have thought of it many times. A sadness because it meant a lot for me to please my father. A feeling of regret perhaps. Even when I was older, I didn't do it often, but, they were there for you to run a thought by or feel their reaction to something. -- pause -- It gave you a feeling of security, or of approval. The something you wanted to do but were not sure of was right, or not right, it helped.

Rem

Their death told me -- pause -- you're on your own. It's scary. It's sad. As long as you have parents you are somebody's child. When they go you assume a closer place to your own death, or assume their role that you don't feel prepared for.

The earlier goal of Jim's hopes, that his parents could see him successful, will not be accomplished. But, the goal, of his hope of becoming successful, is realized. Jim acknowledged that his disturbing life situations cannot be changed. They are difficult to accept and there is lingering resentment at times.

Jim's reminiscences provide a glimpse of how he dealt with struggles and frustrations. An external locus of control appears to have dominated his married life as happenings were perceived and emphasized as were beyond his control. His actions and behavior seem not to make a difference and his status, regarding his family life, remains a source of frustration. Themes of loss, sorrow, and regret dominate his life story. To get away from them he shifted from himself to the environment saying:

Let me tell you what I did once. I was transferred to a branch near my old neighborhood

Rem

for a while. One day I got the idea to trace my steps back to my old school to feel what it would be like. I felt something being back in the neighborhood after so many years. The same school was still there. I went back to my old school. I walked along the same blocks, but things were different. I wanted to get the feelings back that I had when I was a child....My feelings wouldn't come back. Nothing happened. In fact, I was frustrated....You can't go back and you're never going to recapture that which you had as a child by retracing your steps as an adult because your eyes see the world differently.

Jim insightfully shared his feelings reflecting an awareness of his aging and maturation and the changes accompanying them. The disappointment that he couldn't recapture his feelings of youth tell a great deal about him. Because his past was presented as pleasurable and carefree, there is a yearning for those easy days. His present life needs courage. In the concluding remarks in his interview he said:

Reminiscing is really reliving experiences from the past and we are in our lives products of our environment. As we are brought up through life

Rem

all of the things that touch us or effect us
dictate our attachment as we go along in life.

Life is not easy.

Although Jim does not seem to readily accept change, he remains committed to the values and beliefs instilled in him by his parents, and achieved personal growth through his work efforts. Jim's vacillating feelings of acceptance and resentment relating to his present state in life and ongoing regret that his parents died before they could share in his achievement and success expressed in his reminiscences seem to portray behavior of a Negater, struggling for survival in a difficult world. Jim's reminiscences validate a predominantly Negating life story trajectory.

Ruth's reminiscences focused on three phases of her life, her early days, her nursing career, and her marriage. She had to struggle with difficult life experiences in all of them. Her reminiscences showed a dominant external locus of control which would set the stage for her predominantly Negating story style. She began her story as she said, "way back" talking about her mother:

When her sister had children I would keep my dolls
and my stuffed animals. She would give these

Rem

things to her nephew. I'd say, "Why did you do that, Mom?" "Well, you are a big girl now, Ruth, you don't need those." I resented that, my father would give me these things and she'd say, "Oh, the baby wanted that," or "You didn't want that, did you?" "Yes, I did." "Oh Ruth, act your age."

Ruth looked very perplexed as she relived this experience as she reminisced. She paused, and then continued:

I didn't cry. No. I always tried to be the good girl, you know. I didn't want to do bad. Pleasing her, yes. Pleasing her. So to this day my children are buying me stuffed animals. I have stuffed animals in the bedrooms. I suppose people think, "The poor soul. What does she know? God how elegant, she's got stuffed animals." But that goes back to that. It goes back to that. I resented that, my father would give me these things and she'd say, "Oh, the baby wanted that, or You didn't want that, did you?" Yes I did. Yes, I did....Although she was a very good mother, she was a sensitive mother, very good mother, but she wasn't sentimental. That's the word. She wasn't sentimental. It hurt. It really did.

Rem

Cause I'd come home and they'd be gone and I'd miss something. "Where's the so-and-so?" "Oh, I gave it to the baby, Ruth. You didn't want that." "Yes, I did."

Then Ruth paused and refocused:

But I look back at the happy times today, I loved my nursing career, although it was hard, I look back at it and others--a wonderful experience to me as a young nurse. Now that we look back in retrospect. Though, I didn't think it then. I always had a goal: When I graduate.

Now from a new vantage point at the age of 73, Ruth appears to be more aware of past struggles and what she had to do to achieve balance. As her reminiscences seem to be chronologically ordered, she continued reminiscing about her adult coping experiences and then focused on a life state change, marriage. She said:

If things got bad in marriage, or if my husband had an out-burst, I always thought of the happy times. I learned somewhere along the line about sublimation. If I can't get over that mountain, I will sit on that mountain and accept life as it comes. That I've helped myself with.

Rem

Reminiscences dealing with her perceived feelings of non-acceptance by her mother-in-law which subsequently generated reciprocal ones from her were re-evaluated. These feelings were threatening to her sense of self. Subsequently they were resolved.

She was a lovely woman in her own way. As a mother and a wife she was marvelous. Not that she did anything to me. It was all undercover. You know that you weren't accepted. And I felt bad about it. But then as I got older, I really didn't need her, did I?

With the birth of her second child, Ruth realized that her life was filled with happiness and she was able to put away her past unhappy feelings. She recalled:

The resentment and everything stopped at the birth of my second child. I forgot everything then. He was the grandest thing, I thought. Kenny was excellent and then Craig came. Oh, Craig was great. And when Bryan came I was just as happy. I didn't need anybody else--to give me happiness. I found great happiness in my children, which I remember when I had my second child.

In spite of this new found happiness, Ruth sounded indignant when she reminisced now, the dual demands as

Rem

wife and mother weighed heavily upon her as an emphasis on external locus of control continued to dominate her life story. She recalled:

We had a house and I did all the work, and of course everybody did the same thing. But, he came home for lunch one day and I said, "I don't think I'll be able to carry on with this." Kenny was three and Craig was a baby. And he came home for lunch. And I did the work. "I don't think so. I don't think I'll be able to carry on." He said, "Ruth, this is it. There's no one to help you. You have to do it yourself." "Oh," I said, "you're right." I did it. I wonder if he had sided with me. I would have lost everything right? I'd have a dirty house. "Ruth, this is it. This is it right here. There is no one to help you, Ruth. I'm very sorry. But you'll have to do it." "Oh, all right." I got over that hump. I said, "He's right. Yes. I'll be able to do this." I never resented that. Isn't that funny? To cope. yes. So then when Bryan came, I said, "Oh, this is a snap." I know I have to cope. Isn't that funny. I was disappointed in myself because I said, here, I was a nurse, and I

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thought I could cope with this and just got too caught up in it. But I found it hard.

Then Ruth paused and looked pensive, she said, "We have to make ourselves happy or contented; not really happy, but contented." And then Ruth reflected on herself saying, "Because like I said, my whole life was to strive to please. I didn't know where I got that attitude from. Now I resent it at this stage of my life. Why was I always trying to please someone? Why didn't I try to please me? Why didn't I assert myself." Ruth's voice cracked as she spoke angrily looking dismayed and then paused and taking a deep breath continued with her life review, now searching for reasons or explanations for her behavior. "But my father said," she said, in a calmer voice now:

"Always be respectful, Ruth." Like when I complained of my in-laws, I said, "I don't think I like them, Dad." He said, "Ruth, never forget. You have to be respectful." Well, that was wrong advise, because I see people asserting themselves now today. And they know I won't go along with that, but yet, I accepted everything they said and did, because my father said, "Be respectful." I went back to trying to please my mother and

Rem

father.

Sometimes I say to myself, Ruth, you're a big dope. Why did you accept life on those terms? And yet I did. That's what I resent. Not that I did something wrong or somebody did something to me that was wrong, it was just the attitude toward that person and why didn't I assert myself. I find myself saying. You're a big dope, Ruth.

Reflectively, she wondered out loud, continuing to search for the answers to her own questions. "I don't know if I was the child of the times." Ruth continued: And not being assertive was expected. It was the times, the way we were brought up. And society was making us really think that was the way it had to be.

Continuing in this philosophic mode she admitted to an underlying unfulfilled need saying, "And later in life they admired me, and maybe that's what I liked....See, like in late life they gave me praise that I wanted back there." Ruth paused and said firmly:

And when they died, I said, "Look at this, I've worried so much about them dying, and it was all right." So why did I think I couldn't navigate without them? Because I was navigating.

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Ruth's face lit up inspired by the insight gained through the past reinterpreted for today. The painful experiences of childhood are seen differently because she knows now how it all turned out. It was not so bad, she survived. And she moralized at the conclusion of this story, having learned from life:

I try my best now with my daughter-in-laws, you know, because I resented that. But like I say, as I got old, I'd say, "That's foolish, Ruth, why didn't you use your brain and rise above it? But sometimes we can't rise above something, can we?"

I don't feel that way now. But I think that comes with age, because what's the alternative? We're taking the big exit and that's it and you can't stop, right? Whereas when you're younger you have all the time in the world. You're going to correct all these things and it's going to be marvelous. But as you get older you know that isn't so. I think we have to think the things through that passed, think about your reaction to the situation and how you coped with it. And I think it makes you a better person, you know, to think it through and to think what you did then, maybe it was the wrong thing to do. Then you say,

Rem

"Well gee. That was foolish for me to do that. If anything comes up like that again, I'll know what to do."

Ruth displayed her commitment to her perceived role as caretaker and nurturer throughout life and accepted its challenges. She has a lot of regret and she questions the control she took over her own life. Ruth concluded that with her reminiscences she has been able to maintain balance when faced with unsettling difficult life situations. In some ways she seemed to be surprised but, at the same time, she was pleased with this revelation. Ruth's reflection and reappraisal of her past are indicative of a predominantly Negating life review. Her life story did not reflect a stable self representation. Ruth often had doubt about her self worth, worrying about pleasing others and not herself. This is a sign of insecurity characteristic of a predominantly Negating story style. A significant internal locus of control was found lacking over all. Ruth's narrative seemed to indicate that an external locus of control prevailed since her childhood when her mother provided the external locus of control. Ruth's narratives demonstrated a shifting but consistent external locus of control over the years. There was

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her mother-in-law, her husband, her life state responsibilities and the childhood personality attribute to please others, generated from parental influence, which re-surfaced from time to time but remained dominant in her stories. Extensive time was also spent talking about her childhood struggles which is another characteristic of the Negater's style of story presentation.

Helen's reminiscences validate her tend toward a Negating life story style as she spoke of the personal sorrow she experienced since the loss of her husband and her struggle dealing with it over the years.

I lost my husband 24 years ago and I don't want to go back and keep thinking about losing him. It was nice having the children, but it was sad being alone and being - just bringing them up by myself - so I like to keep going on. I don't want to go back and think of the years I lost him....You think back and wish that things could be different. But you can't change things. They happened and there's no turning back. I really try not to think about the past. I think if you reminisce too deeply, it's bad mental health because you live in it. It has to be behind you

Rem

and you have to keep moving forward.

Helen reminisced about her childhood and her parents but she told more stories directly related to her father. Her stories have less explanation and showed more external locus of control. She said:

My father had pneumonia and because of his age went into lung complications. It was so sudden. It was very strange after his death, you know, getting used to the fact that he wasn't there any more. There were so many changes. It got so quiet because the company stopped coming. The children really missed him. After I lost my husband the children were so lucky to have this arrangement. Although he could never replace their father, he was strong. He was strict. They thought he was a stern disciplinarian and they always kid about that.

Helen's father was her source of hope as he provided support for the actualization of her goals for her children. Losing him was another blow to her.

Helen reminisced about her home which seemed to provide her with a safe refuge not only from the outside but also from the inner struggles that she had to contend with. She seemed to find great comfort

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there. One of the characteristics of the Negating life story style is shifting focus such as Helen shifting from self to environmental events. She said:

My father owned this house. Two years ago we celebrated 50 years at here, with a Mass at church and a party.

In response to talk of how the old block changed she said:

I know people often tell me how things have changed. I tell them, it hasn't changed very much. It really stayed very nice. It's a long time to be here. People say, it changed, it changed. It won't change unless they change. If you keep everything -- you know in perspective it won't change.

Although Helen seems to resist acknowledging change, she struggles for the locus of control. It seems that the external locus of control in her life was seen by her as her fate which she could neither change nor overcome. Fate's untimely intrusion into her life, the sudden death of her young husband, continued to control her life indefinitely.

Helen seemed satisfied with her life now, she said, "don't go back. I think it's sadness to go

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back." The loss of her husband was the turning point for her and her response determined the direction of the trajectory and the nature of her resilience. Helen took a positive stand. In spite of her sorrow she accepted her single parenting role. Although she appeared to be content with the way it all turned out especially concerning her children, she struggled not to reminisce in order to try to distance herself from her painful past, which had an afflictive impact on her life story. As predominantly a Negater, her reminiscences do validate her Negating life story style.

The third category of story style presentations is the Despairing style described by Fallot (1976 p. 12) as follows:

The Despairers are painfully aware of and likely to be preoccupied with themes of regret and painful awareness of unresolved conflict-laden issues. More depression and guilt are manifest during the reminiscence session and there is a decrease in self representation. The Despairers' stories also reflect an ongoing external locus of control, and as the Negaters demonstrate, less autonomy.

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Sister Mary was the only participant whose reminiscences tended toward this category. Sister Mary had conducted a private life review earlier to "be ready" for her interview. In her reminiscences she reflected on her earlier life, her hope to enter the convent, the circumstances concerning that decision, and her ongoing inner struggles when she did. Since she relinquished her inner locus of control when she embraced religious life and her life story is dominated with themes of regret and loss, she is characterized as predominantly a Despairer.

Well, I think about my early days a lot and it means a great deal to me. They probably do because I left home at such an early age. I was nineteen when I left for the convent. When I wanted to become a sister I told my dad but he was very close to me and didn't want me to go. When I told him I wanted to be a Sister of Charity of Halifax Nova Scotia, he said, "No!" He said that he didn't want me to leave the United States. I thought that maybe we could compromise but he said to wait. He told me that if I still had this crazy idea next year, he would let me go. Well, I wanted to go and my mother was all in favor of it,

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so I saved my money for a year and then went. Sister sought support for her decision and the struggle to maintain an inner locus of control by saying that her mother was "all in favor of it".

The narrative continues as sister reminisced about one constraint of convent life she experienced as a naive novice. And as she reflected on it now, her voice became more expressive. She put her hands to her face, and as her eyes rolled, she laughed heartily. From the vantage point of a safe present, knowing the results, she could see the situation differently now.

Another thing I remember when I had entered, if we had certification we would go right into a college class....So the one that was in charge of the studies for the whole community -- ah -- pause -- she came up to the classroom and said, "Now, if Miss Morgan gets the certain certification from regents -- ah -- we will accept that and she will go right into her college class." So she said, "I'll take care of it." And, I boldly, I raised my hand and said, "I can take care of that. I can write." [laugh] And she said, "You'll do nothing of the kind." [laughed] Well I said to myself, "Mary, if you want to be a good Sister of

Rem

Charity, learn to keep your mouth shut. [laughed]

I tried to remember that through the years."

Sister resolved to try to never ever break that pledge. This was probably one of the most important turning points in her life as she realized that she would have to change. That took self discipline, and the loss of her inner locus of control.

There were other times when Sister Mary had to adjust to the constraints of convent life. Her reminiscences reflected her realization that she was unable to minister to her family during their time of need, and the inner disturbing feelings she experiences as a result. She recalled sadly:

After I was in the novitiate, my mom and dad came for a visit. On the way home they had an automobile accident. They wouldn't tell me in the convent because you weren't supposed to leave that first year or you would have to do it all over again. They had certain rules. They told me months later. I was able to visit him then. Dad had been really hurt....But there was really nothing I could do about it. Do you know what I mean? There is a sadness associated with my early religious life.

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Sister Mary continued to experience inner unrest from the restraints and constraints that she had not adjusted to during her early convent life but she remained committed. She continued to tell the rest of the story saying:

Dad got sick again. His resistance was very weak. He had gotten a cold....Mom told him that if he wasn't better in a day she would call the doctor. Mom went to check him and he was dead. His heart couldn't take the strain any longer they said.

Sister Mary basically had a strong will and was a determined individual otherwise she would not have been able to leave home. She took control of her life by her decision, but once it was made she felt that control was permanently relinquished. She had the courage to go and the commitment to stay. Now, she is bound to obey and as a Sister she remains faithful to convent rules. She feels she is not able to act, therefore, sadness continues to pervade her. She reminisced about her continued distress:

Well, I was teaching at the time and had a wonderful superior. She was a genius. But, I found that she had a lack of compassion. I knew on a Sunday morning that something was wrong. She

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said, "Your father had a bad cold," and was taking it very slowly and mildly, so I said to myself something's the matter. Then she told me my father died. But, on Monday morning mid-term exams were starting so she had the courage to say, "Sister I need you in school Monday morning." He died Saturday night, remember. She said, "You can go home on Monday on the Long Island Railroad. The children's bus can take you to the railroad." That took a lot out of me. It really did. Mom really needed me at that time. It took a lot out of me. I was very sad. I still get the same feelings the way I felt when it happened, the same feelings, the same exactly. The superior was very strict. I felt horrible.

During her teaching tenure she encountered more challenges, reminiscing about one in particular. "I was teaching while Brother Damian was here as principal, and had great difficulty. It hurt. The hurt was there for such a long time that I had to take a--pause--go in for a healing retreat. I felt I just couldn't go on."

Realizing that she was in distress, Sister was able to attend a retreat. The characterizations of

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hope are reflected; the unrest, the action, the goal of healing, and its actualization, necessary for the maintenance of the continuity of the self.

Themes of sadness and loss continue to prevail in Sister Mary's life story. She continued by relating a more recent experience. She said:

When I received word that my nephew had AIDS. And ah-- I felt that some members of the family couldn't accept this. But the girls were very compassionate. The part I didn't like was that in 1988, the family knew that he was HIV positive and they kept it from me. When they told me he had AIDS I was heartbroken. I said to myself, oh, I can't tell anybody that my nephew had AIDS. I just can't. It was just against my grain. I kept it to myself. In March, when he had only a few months to live, I couldn't tell the whole crowd, only the ones who were sympathetic. I saw their reaction when the story about Magic Johnson having AIDS came on television. And, every time you turned on the television there was a story about him and AIDS. I thought, I'm just going to see the reaction of the sisters if they hear that. If they down the poor fellow, I could

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never tell them about my poor nephew, Stephen, thirty-four years old and never married. So during the evening the whole community was there and some were so sympathetic towards Magic....but there were three, oh, they did such a job on him, poor Magic. They couldn't understand that at all. But we're all so human, we're all so human, so vulnerable. It caused a great heaviness in me, you know. I guess I carried that burden for a whole year that I could have shared that would have relieved my heaviness.

Perhaps that heaviness seemed to be relieved somewhat at the Mass of Reconciliation offered at his funeral. Sister Mary listened and seemed to accept what the priest said:

Lets make up our mind right here and now at this Mass that we want Stephen to have his freedom, and we want his freedom, and the only way you are going to give him that freedom is to just let go, let go and realize that he is in the presence of God, because he has made atonement. Remember if the good thief was able to win paradise, so can Stephen.

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In spite of the toll Stephen's illness and death seemed to take, and the personal pain that was experienced, the priest's homily seemed to provide her with some relief from the tremendous burden she experienced. But the hurt of not being able to share her feelings with the other sisters initially, seemed to be re-experienced by her recollections.

In a reflective moment, Sister Mary looked up from her notes and sighed, saying softly:

But, I have some great memories....I really loved my life as a sister. Looking back on everything, it was all part of it....The way we lived was part of doing God's work. It was hard in the beginning. Now things have changed and it's a lot better they're not as strict as they used to be and I really enjoy the things I do, I always did. Hope can have its orientation toward earthly goals or toward eternal goals. Roberts (1982) claimed that an individual whose hope is grounded in a relationship with God still hopes for things of the earth, but, if these earthly hopes meet with disappointment, the individual's eternal hope allows a healthy perspective and the individual is sustained.

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Entering the convent was a major turning point in Sister's life. Her personal needs were abrogated by "the call" as rigid regulations were imposed by convent rules. Sister's sadness returns during silent reminiscences as a suffering of the human spirit. Frankl (1965) contended that meaning can be found in suffering and that individuals who have a high purpose in life have a more accepting attitude towards inevitable suffering experiences. Because some of these reminiscences were very private they were given out parsimoniously. Outwardly she appeared resolute as she reassured herself that because she answered "the call" with courage, and made a commitment that she had chosen the correct path. It has not all been in vain. This is important to her. Sister's dominant pattern is that of a Despairer. Her reminiscences validate prevailing themes of personal regret, over multiple losses, and painful unresolved conflict-laden issues, such as her inability to leave the convent when her father died, her inability to share her sorrow about her nephew, and even her difficulties with the school principal. Sister's life story trajectory represents a "despairing" relationship within her inner life and her private personal past.

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In summary, in this theoretical category, the life story trajectory, the participants reminiscences reflected the life story style categories described by Fallot (1976). Subsequently they were determined to be Affirmers, Negaters or Despairers.

Narratives of the Novum

The ability to narrate involves experiencing, knowing, and telling. Human beings have an inner urge to narrate, to tell about what has moved them deeply (Adler, 1931). Narrative is the way in which stories give shape and expression to our lives (Witherell & Noddings, 1990); is a way of knowing about ourselves and other knowers (Bruner, 1986); is the story fabric dealing with the vicissitudes of human thought (Taylor, 1989). The moral in the participants' life stories, that life is neither easy nor predictable, was narrated in their reminiscences.

The Novum are new, or unusual experiences that randomly occur as points along the life story trajectory. The Novum experienced may be conceptualized as threads, symbolic connections, woven into the tapestry of life. Based on the nature of the experience, inner resources may be activated as participants play out their lives plotting their

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trajectory pathway. Some Novum became central in the participants' life, likened to the experience of watching a pebble fall into a still lake, its ripples reverberating endlessly. The Novum explicated from the participants' narratives tended toward life-loss, life-state change or life-gain. Theoretically they can be separated into categories but in reality they are braided into the whole of life experience.

Life-gains range from the simple to the sublime. The Novum of life-gain articulated by the participants included the births of children, grand-children and great-grand-children and experiences with family, friends, faith and love which are essential for the achievement of meaning. The participants all stated that Novum of life-gain served to sustain them during difficult times. Frankl (1959) stated that it is the loss of someone or something that triggers the realization of what has the highest value for one's life.

Life-loss was the most frequently experienced Novum narrated by the participants. Loss happens. Many losses occur throughout life. Common losses are of loved ones; parents, spouses and siblings, pals and pets; of productivity, mobility, and utility; body

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image; time to live; status, prestige, and income; home and belongings; health; the feeling of being needed and loved; of choice and purpose in life (Ebersole & Hess, 1991).

A major Novum of life-loss experienced by the participants seemed to be the loss of parents and spouses, but others types of loss were also narrated in the reminiscences. Jim summarized his feelings related to the loss of parents. He said: "As long as you have parents, you're somebody's child. When they go, you assume a closer place to your own death, or assume their role that you don't feel prepared for". Jim continues to grieve this loss. He said,

When I became successful in life they were both dead. I feel bad about that. They could never share that experience with me, of achievement. That meant a lot to me. They couldn't enjoy my children. I think it meant a lot -- pause --It meant a lot to make them proud. I have thought of it many times. I feel a sadness because it meant a lot for me to please my father.

The Novum of Life-loss related to his parents' death left Jim with continued unresolved feelings of regret.

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Although Jim's marriage was a life-state change it was followed by another significant Novum of loss, the birth and burden of a handicapped child creating chronic sorrow. Jim's ongoing grief over multiple life-losses evolved into a central theme over time. Jim grieved for the loss of his childhood, which he presented as a time of carefree living. He grieved the loss of his freedom, the image of the ideal child and that of the ideal family as well as missed opportunities related to his Novum of life-state change.

May and Bob experienced the loss of a parent as a Novum in early childhood. When May's father died May's loss included the loss of maternal nurturing and family life because she lived in a boarding school. This experience became a Novum of life-state change. May's reminiscences reflected a central theme woven from the interrelatedness of the three types of Novum. As an adult she did produce the family she never had as a child and she seemed to remain positive about life in spite of a difficult beginning. As a result, a major part of her life was spent nurturing her large family, her Novum of life-gain. Her positive stance and

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success at changing her life was reflected in her reminiscences.

Bob lost his mother when he was only nine but unlike May, he received subsequent nurturing from other family members. Other Novum of life-loss were narrated. Bob lost his first wife and several siblings over time. His ability to cope, and to derive strength from his losses became central in his reminiscences and evolved from the Novum of life-loss. In spite of them, he proceeded with his life in a very positive manner.

A significant life-loss Novum narrated by Ruth also occurred in early childhood. Disturbing feelings still return when Ruth remembers the times she found her stuffed animals missing. They were gifts from her father and she said, "I wanted them". Pleasing her mother was important, she suffered the loss in silence but the lost toys seemed to be symbols of the assault on her identity and self-esteem. At present Ruth still wondered, "Why was I always trying to please someone? Why didn't I try to please me? Now I resent it at this stage of my life. Why didn't I assert myself." Ruth indicated that only recently has she gained insight into the life long internal conflict that became a

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central issue for her related to this Novum of life-loss that was reflected in her narratives.

Vera, Helen, May and Alice experienced the sudden loss of their husbands which seemed to be the most significant Novum in their lives. For Alice, the loss of her husband of 48 years, two years ago was perhaps the only one that she has not been able to deal with, yet. As long as he was by her side, nothing was too much to bear. Alice cried and said, "I miss him so much. We went everywhere together. We took walks together. Now, I'm walking alone." Her Novum of life-loss precipitated one of life-state change, widowhood, that she finds difficult to deal with.

For Helen, the crushing effect of her Novum of life-loss was still experienced. Although she had gone on with her life, raised her children and was comfortable, the sorrow that ensued prevented a place in her heart from ever healing. Helen did not like to reminisce although she said there are many happy things way back. It was too painful to remember; she just could not make sense out of it at all. Her narratives indicated that this has become the central issue of her life now and it remains unresolved.

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Sister Mary's narratives demonstrated the interrelatedness of Novum that seemed to stem from a series of related experiences that occurred early in her religious life. Because they were never personally resolved, they continued to intrude on her inner thoughts as silent reflections which continued to elicit regret. She said, "I have a couple of sad incidents in my life that sort of get me and that same sadness seems to pervade me the way it first occurred." There were so many regrets over her life-losses and her life-state change. First, her father's accident, and her inability to be with him because the convent had certain rules. "They told me months later. I was able to visit him then." And later, the unfortunate circumstances accompanying her parents deaths. They both died alone. Ironically, the foundation for spiritual development has its roots in the relationships children develop with loving parents. Yet, because of her own choice, the religious life, she lost the opportunity to comfort them during their time of need.

Sister Mary reminisced about a significant Novum that included both life-state changes and life-loss that occurred when she left for the convent. She said:

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I told my dad but he was very close with me and didn't want me to go. And when I was leaving, I had never seen my father cry before. We went by boat. A friend and I who was also entering. When we left the pier, I saw him cry. This saddened me. There was so much strength in this man, in his character and in his way of living. I can't believe this, that he is actually crying, I said.

Sister Mary's narrated reminiscences also unveiled experiences of her life-state change. The Novum of convent life disclosed the following: its harshness and lack of compassion, her sense of powerlessness, the passive subordination that was a requisite, and the intense unresolved sadness she internalized over time.

Narratives of the Novum related to life-state changes were articulated in Bob's reminiscences. Over the years he seemed to have cultivated a healthy coping style in response. A central Novum of life-state change unfolded when Bob's father remarried. Bob's stepmother was not wanted and Bob and his siblings gave her a hard time. Later on, Bob's first wife died leaving him with a young son. Bob remarried. Flashbacks from his youth caused a great deal of anxiety. Bob worried that his son would have the same

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feelings that he had towards his stepmother. Bob was able to resolve the issue.

Vera reminisced about the Novum associated with life-loss and life-state changes related to several life events that were turning points in her life. These included her divorce, her remarriage, and then the sudden death of her second husband, their impact on her life, and her need to adapt to widowhood. Vera repeatedly spoke of her loneliness and trips to the cemetery, referring to them as "visits". Although they were not as frequent now as they had been, the ensuing loneliness remained central for her.

A significant narrated Novum of life-gain for Bob were his strong church affiliations since childhood. He had met his first wife through church activities and felt that he had gained strong values as a result, and he wanted the same for his son. Bob "shopped" for a church so his son could have the same advantages. As an early life experience the ripple effect of this Novum is traced over time and its impact on his life continues.

According to Alice's narratives, the births of her six children were her Novum of life-gain and outweighed anything else. In her opinion, other Novum that were

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experienced during her marriage were dealt with positively. Her husband's support mitigated any losses.

Helen's narratives were filled with happy new experiences, her life-gains, as she had given birth to healthy twins. The untimely death of her young husband, a Novum of life-loss precipitated a Novum of life-state change, widowhood. She said:

You think back and wish that things could have been different. But you can't change things, they happened and there's no turning back. I try not to think about the past. If you do, you would be sad all the time even though there are happy memories way back.

In summary, narratives of the Novum in the life stories of the participants mainly focused on life-loss, life-state change and life-gain. How the participants were able to deal with the Novum that occurred on their life trajectory reverberated through out their life story as told in their narrated reminiscences.

A-Leaving-of-Legacies

The participants came to their interview prepared to reminisce and shared their own stories which

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included a leaving-of-legacies. This process which is theoretically linked with the review of one's life can also be considered a generative activity when it is shared through the narrative. One of the most frequently used modes of transmission of legacies is by transcending time and mortality with words. Helen's reminiscences identify with generational accomplishments:

I was born in World War I, and along came World War II. I had a boyfriend. He was in the service four and a half years. When he came out there wasn't an apartment to be found. It was lucky he got his old job back. This was a one family house that was converted. We rented my father's apartment when we go married. When we first moved in, my brother and the war years...my mother saw him go and come back, thank God.

When reminiscing about a more recent event she said:

Last year we celebrated 50 years at Mc Kay, so I wrote Fifty Years at Mc Kay. We had a Mass at Our Lady of Angels and my son read my story in church. Everyone was so pleased with it. It took me a lot of time to go back all those years.

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Helen spoke of the family's enjoyment rereading her "mother's European vacation correspondence" and treasures the family's heirloom pictures. The surviving evidence of her family's existence became a part of her personal history and a leaving-of-legacies of great enduring value.

For Alice a leaving-of-legacies of property and assets were the result of her husband's efforts and she proudly gestured around the room while telling about the long hours of work needed to renovate the old house they bought.

John will look at the house and say, "Hey, I put this here. You see that?" Alice said that her sons look around and reminisce about working with "daddy" and how they resented it at the time because they had to stay nearby. "Daddy needed lumber--go in the yard and get it." Her son, John, looks back now and says, "Wow, its terrific! I became a carpenter because of him." And he built his own house.

She adds with pride.

Another reminiscence describes her grandson's reaction when she gave him grandpa's tie-tac as a gift, a leaving-of-legacies pertaining to his personal

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possessions. He said, "This is from grandpa?" "You can use it", she said. "No, no, no, I have to save it. I'll always think of grandpa", and she added, "taking the bow off the package, he put it on his forehead. My husband used to do that, you know, clown for the children. They really remember all his little details." Alice is pleased to see a lot of her husband's characteristics emulated by her children and grand-children because he was a "good man and lived his faith in his everyday life."

Being pleased with the reflection of their parent's traits, Vera often tells her grand-daughter, "You remind me of your aunt, you're your father's daughter", adding, that some of the behavior is conscious because the "kids" imitate, but they are often not aware of it and she is, and feels a sense of accomplishment which for her is a legacy of the intangible family characteristics.

From Jim's reminiscences crucial factors to his personal success come into focus. Jim's describes his father as a "very strict cop. He wouldn't let his sons step out of line not one little bit. Everything was that's not right you have your name to uphold. We were brought up with that and we accepted that," Jim said.

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"And my brother and I conducted ourselves exactly the same. It really paid off. It worked in the long run." Jim's legacy is his strong values acquired from his father.

May's legacy is her long life. Her reminiscences indicate that she is a survivor of a lonely long childhood in a convent boarding school, the great depression, the world wars, and other personal sorrows. "I'm very fortunate", she said, "considering how I started life off alone. I wound up with five children and twelve grand-children, and almost three great-grand children, one is on the way."

Although she was an only child, she said, "My mother shared many memories with me while we lived together. I never knew my father but I have the pictures and see him in one of my sons." In another reminiscence she said:

One of my grandsons is quite accomplished at the piano. He takes after my father, I think. He was an accomplished musician. I think that talent he has--it's in his genes.

Bob left a legacy for his son, Paul. "And I think the church was big in our lives then." Bob referred to the church as, "a family thing."

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And being in the church all the time, I think it kept us off the street. I married a girl from the church. I think it kept us straight. When Paul was growing up, I went shopping for a church, believe it or not. We had moved. And what I was looking for was, did they have a program for kids growing up, a Sunday morning kindergarten church, and what they had for activities.

The church I found had everything. Paul went there from the day I could take him until he went off to college. All his friends went there. They all did something with themselves...what I'm trying to say is that they had the church to fall back on. Because my life centered around the church and I wanted Paul's life to center around the church, because you have to get some good out of it.

Ruth reminisced about her children and grandchildren. They were her legacy. She raised them to continue the family values.

I thought my children were good. I've reminisced a lot about those days and my childhood too. Yes, I think my children have accused me of that. I tell them, "When I was a girl my father would say

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this and my mother"... "Oh mom", Kenny would say. He is very much like his father. Of all the three, he the most. His father was very good with little children, I have to say. Sometimes we reminisce about the times the boys were young, especially when the grand-children do the same things. You know what I mean? The grand-children surpass all that. They are the grandest.... Now I'm trying to tell them the right things. She listens. She listens, because she's the oldest. And I'll get to the youngest, I'll get to them. I used some of the same methods my parents used on me with my children because it worked. I see some of the same happening with their children. My children all turned out well. We used some good common sense and I tell them all about it. They listen too."

In summary, everyone has a life story; its meaning articulated through words. Each day we transcend time as we communicate our thoughts to others and establish our immortality. Helen's reminiscences identified with generational accomplishments as she valued her family history. Old personal letters, picture albums and scrap books became treasured symbols of her past and of

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her roots. She used oral history to transmit this rich cultural legacy to her heirs. Alice used personal property to keep the memory of her husband alive. She gave her grandson grandpa's tie-tac. Jim believed that the intangible values of honesty and integrity were legacies from his father, he hopes to pass them on too. Bob's legacies are also intangible ones as he believes that his church connections were invaluable and wanted the same for his son. Ruth learned from life. She regrets not taking more control of her life, pleasing herself instead of always pleasing others. She hopes to impart this wisdom to her grand-children. May's legacy is her long life.

A Making-of-Spiritual-Links

Spirituality is a concept throughout the life span and spiritual integrity has been identified as a basic human need. The participants' spiritual expression was articulated in their reminisced life story.

Spirituality has been describes by Frankl (1952) as the creative values that give meaning to one's life. The creative values are: the achievement of tasks; experiential values that enable the experiencing of goodness, beauty, truth, or a relationship with a significant other; how they played out their life. The

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participants reflected a making-of-spiritual-links through their narrated reminiscences. Ruth's provided a developmental theme to religious activities related to her spiritual dimension saying:

I have no remorse about my life decisions. No. We were brought up to be good girls. Right? I mean God forbid if you committed a sin. I think it was impounded in us to be good, and as I suppose, we live by that ethic....I had twenty years of religious training, non-stop. There was such a continuum. Just got bigger and bigger, from grade school, then to high school, and then to college. And training came in there too. And I had the nuns....I loved it. I love my religion to this day. I just love it.

Jim's reminiscences portrayed an ongoing spiritual force in his life, "What I reminisce a lot about is my church activities when I was a young fellow in my twenties and thirties....I was very active in church work. I am going to a church meeting after the interview."

As a member of a religious community for more than 25 years, Sister Mary's reminiscences convey her church connections, personal beliefs and ministering missions

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through her commitment to a life of prayer and services.

When I wanted to become a sister...I was young. I entered the convent when I was 19 years old. When I look back on my life as a sister with such wonderful memories. I really loved my life as a sister.

Eucharistic ministering does a lot for me....It's not enough to bring the Eucharist to people. You have to live that life too...doing God's work.

I love to volunteer with the homebound parish members, it gives me a lot of satisfaction.

Bob's spiritual dimension and "making-of-spiritual-links" seemed to begin in his youth, reflecting his parents' values and beliefs, and church connections.

You know I had a wonderful childhood. And our childhood was connected to the church. In fact, my dad used to say, "Why don't you sleep at the church. You're there seven days a week." We sang in the church choir, we went on church picnics. Come to think of it, we had a church camp...and my family went there, my mother used to go there.

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Because my life centered around the church, I wanted the same for my son....you have to get some good out of it.

And Bob also quoted the passage of the bible in his narrated reminiscences that referred to his spirituality.

In Alice's reminiscences, the making-of-spiritual-links can be seen during her marriage. And, the bases for her spiritual feelings were reflected in her family ties.

But we had a lot of beautiful memories. My brother-in-law was a doctor...He was blessed with true faith in God....He wrote me a letter thanking Tom for taking him on a retreat with him. We had six girls, all married. They all went on retreat once a year together...and they would walk in, their wings sprouted..."We're angels today." Tom tried to imitate my brother-in-law...very, very, very pious...put God first in his speech, in his actions, in his life, and Tom tried to imitate him. And he wrote me a letter thanking me for marrying Tom, because Tom brought the boys together.

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Helen's reminiscences provided an example of her spiritual dimension, it's strength and the turning inward for courage. Her church connections are strong. She reminisced:

Today was the birthday of a very dear friend of mine, who is now deceased....I went to church today and prayed for her. I really missed her a lot....We had a lot of happy times together.

While on another thought she said, "Our fifty years at Bay Street" was celebrated with a Mass at Our Lady of Angels and my twins were the altar boys.

Helen is a church volunteer for Alzheimer's patients,

"I was up at six this morning and went to the Alzheimer's all morning and later in the day I went to the AARP presentation, so I've had a full day."

In summary, participants in this study were comfortable with their beliefs. Church connections, personal beliefs and ministering missions seemed to be a consistent sources of inner strength for some participants linking their inner spiritual dimension with their outward expression over their life course and were narrated in their reminiscences.

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Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explicate the meaning of reminiscence for the well elderly living in the community. The well elderly were chosen for study since the literature reviewed indicated a lack of knowledge relating to reminiscence in this population. The participants all reminisced. Literature on reminiscence supported this activity. It was theorized that it was necessary to understand the process and styles of reminiscence as a basis for understanding this practice. The literature on reminiscence identified the accepted process and styles of this phenomenon. Since reminiscence is a function of memory and autobiographical memory shares the properties of memory, exploring memory was relevant to expand our understanding of the meaning of reminiscence. The data presented in Chapter 4 will be discussed in the following manner. Theoretical categories that emerged from the data will be discussed individually. The findings will be discussed as they relate to the literature.

The Life-Story Trajectory

The Life Story Trajectory comprised divergent life paths based on Fallot's (1976) definitions of life-

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story styles of presentation, Affirming, Negating and Despairing. Fallot's styles of presentation were traced through the participants' narrated reminiscences which showed all of the patterns he described.

Vera, Bob, May and Alice displayed an Affirming style of story presentation and were labeled Affirmers. Their life stories reflected a general sense of self-acceptance in both positive and negative experiences with no one time designated better or worse. Their stories were well organized, had more private interpretation in which the self was well represented and was consistently stable. A strong internal locus of control prevailed. Overall, these participants presented an attitude of affirmation and acceptance. There was a willingness to accept one's own past, and positive emotions were associated with the reminiscences.

Jim, Ruth and Helen were determined to be Negaters. Jim and Ruth's life stories often reverted back to childhood, shifting the focus from self to the environment. Jim spoke of the negative aspects of his life in a matter of fact way, distancing himself from them as he did when telling about his retarded daughter. Helen struggled to distance herself from her

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past by not reminiscing. Ruth spoke at length during her interview without mention of a negative event. Overall, there was a less stable self-representation in their life stories than in those of the Affirmers. These participants had wavering attitudes towards acceptance and their stories indicated that a strong sense of external locus of control had dominated their life course.

Sister Mary was the only Despairer. Throughout Sister's narratives showed the painful awareness of unresolved conflict and themes of regret because as she reminisced she confronted disappointments and lost opportunities. Her self rejection and continued recrimination characterized her life story style of presentation as Despairing.

The findings of this theoretical category indicated that the content and structural aspects of the participants' reminiscences could be identified and used to categorize their story styles of presentation. The findings are consistent with literature, sufficient to indicate that Fallot's categories may be valid for this population. Kart (1991) supported the notion of divergent pathways by explaining that at each point of growth and development there are several paths that a

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person can take. When dealing with the randomness of life, we may undertake a variety of maneuvers to play out our own needs, such as accepting new challenges, choosing amid uncertainty, struggling for balance, and maintaining continuity of the self (Butler, 1972).

Fallot's categories of life story styles have provided a base for this study, differentiating life-story styles and categorizing reminiscers accordingly. These findings may help to explain some of the inconsistencies found in the literature related to the adaptive value of reminiscence. For instance, reminiscence was not found to affect depression or self esteem in community residents in the study by Perrotta and Meacham (1982); while reminiscence sessions supported adaptive functions in a study by Liton and Olstein (1969).

Erickson (1959) and Lowenthal et al. (1976) concluded that the individual needs to be able to cope with life stressors, problem solve, adjust to loss and decline, and retain a level of self-esteem in order to achieve successful adaption. Lowenthal saw two important concepts as vital to adaption: hope and self-concept. Hope, defined as a sense of time-projection of the life span, maintains the older person

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as a being-in-progress. Self-concept, a compliment to hope, is maintained as long as individuals have personal control over their lives. The extent to which the individual maintains both hope and self-concept is a measure of their adaptive level (Stanley, 1978). This is strongly affected by the degree to which they feel in control of their lives (Lewis, 1971). These requisites are congruent with Fallot's Affirming life story style and fit in well with the acceptance of one's life-time and the positive emotional response to reminiscing one's life story. This constellation of factors may be used effectively to explicate the meaning of reminiscence.

The Negaters and Despairers on the other hand were unable to resolve some past painful experiences and to maintain the continuity of a positive self. For this population, reminiscing seemed to have limited adaptive value.

Some of the inconsistencies found in research studies relating to ego-integrity and reminiscence may also be explained by these findings. Lewis (1971) concluded that certain individuals ward off threat to self-esteem by reminiscing. Revere (1971) found that many elderly adults reminisce at length without ever

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attaining Erickson's goal of self acceptance, obtaining results inconsistent with those of Boylin, Havighurst and Glasser (1972), Carlson (1984) and Gorney (1969). Achieving integrity means coming to terms with oneself and "accepting life as a totality with all its gains and losses; the acceptance of significant people in one's life whether they were a positive or negative influence" as one reaches this stage of life. The characteristics necessary for the achievement of ego-integrity are also congruent with Fallot's (1976) Affirming life story style of presentation. Negaters and Despairers may not be able to achieve ego-integrity as their life story repeatedly evokes negative recollections of unresolved conflict that also evoke sadness.

Study findings indicated that life can be seen as a succession of events with their meaning possibly determined only in retrospect as each individual's unique make-up elicits varied responses to the randomness of life events. The reminisced life stories portrayed the unique personal attributes of the participants such as hope, control, courage, commitment and resilience. These characteristics have not been described by Fallot but seem to fit in with Fallot's

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categories and expand on what he said. Some of these personal attributes seemed to be dominant for the Affirmers, complimenting the characteristics of the Affirming story style, or they may have moved participants towards an Affirming trajectory course. Only sporadic traces of these attributes were identified in the narratives of Negaters or Despairers.

These findings can be explained with the discussion related to the theoretical category, narratives of the-Novum as the participants' inner resources from individual coping styles and personal attributes were activated as a Novum occurred.

Narratives of the-Novum

The findings indicated that narrative provided the conceptual link between categories. The participants' narratives of the-Novum were personally significant and reflected issues that became central as a result. Literature supported these findings indicating that the narrative is "a powerful tool used to describe the human condition, unlocking the secrets held in one's autobiographical memory" (Kaufman, 1986, p. 27). Neisser (1982) concluded that a great deal can be learned about an individual from his or her memories.

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The-Novum explicated from the narratives were Novum of life-gain, life-loss and life-state change. The participants had little difficulty dealing with a Novum of life-gain, but other variables seemed to come into play as the participants attempted to deal with the other two types. These variables included the personal attributes of hope, courage, control, commitment, and resilience. Examples of these findings were explicated from the narratives of the Affirmers. For instance, Vera, Bob, May and Alice reflected the attribute hope.

Hope, the energized mental state involving feelings of uncertainty, is characterized by an action-oriented expectation that a positive outcome is possible. When the Affirmers' lives were changed by the Novum of loss, they continued to strive for reorganization with hope, and succeeded to a great degree by their adjustment with confidence and independence. Hope is necessary for satisfactory coping (Weisman, 1979). "To hope is a state of being...an inner readiness....a psychic commitment to life and growth" (From, 1968, p. 11).

For Vera's and Alice, bereavement was ongoing as the grief from the deep personal loss was re-

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experienced because of loneliness. Hope strengthens individuals to deal with difficulties and stressors that accompany suffering, loss, loneliness, and other human tragedies (Travelbee, 1971). Reminiscence provided the Affirmers with transient, intangible, moments of happiness as they remembered the good times and the others. Reminiscence served as a temporary reprieve from the prevailing loneliness experienced as their life trajectories changed with the loss. Hope is related to choice as hopeful individuals can see different paths for the accomplishment of their goals (Travelbee, 1971).

As Affirmers, Vera, Bob, Alice and May reflected some degree of courage, control, and commitment, managing the stress of the Novum, life-loss, in a positive way. Commitment implies action, becoming involved in an experience or with a cause. Control is the confidence in one's own resources and ability to impact on the results of one's efforts related to the cause.

Collectively, the Affirmers' stories reflect the notion that change rather than stability is life's norm. Vera accepted change after her husband's death as did May and Alice. Change is seen as a challenge

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instead of a threat and challenge is a stimulus for personal growth (Kadner, 1989). Although Bob and May lost parents in early childhood the changes that ensued seemed to be a stimulus for their personal growth as Bob acquired a positive coping style and May became self-directive.

The Affirmers' life story style was complimented by the personal attribute resilience, when confronted with the Novum of life-loss. Resilient individuals are able to recover from or adjust to life's misfortune or changes that occur and to regain their sense of balance, maintaining continuity of the self. Bob experienced typical stressors until the loss of his mother at the age of nine. The development of ego resiliency resulted from the secure relationships and uncritical acceptance provided by the other members of his nuclear family. Just as he was resilient in dealing with adversity, the death of his mother, that resiliency was again challenged with the death of his wife and later his siblings. Each time, successful resolution of the conflict occurred. The lasting outcome, or ego quality of each stage, achieved through a central process, provides the resources for coping

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(Erickson, 1979), which compliments the style of Affirmer.

Vera, Alice, Bob and May maintained continuity of self in spite of their Novum of life-loss that occurred in early childhood. May's Affirming life story style was also interrelated with her personal attributes of hope, and resilience dealing with her early life in a boarding school without maternal nurturing and loneliness, her Novum of life-loss.

These finding can be linked with Fallot's life story style categories. These personal attributes are congruent with Fallot's Affirming story style and they may expand his definition. The findings indicated that in the Affirming story style of presentation, the participants narrated the-Novum in their life story positively.

In situations of Affirmation, individuals are certain of their worth and value and are held in esteem (Kart, 1990). The participants' determined to have the dominant pattern of an Affirmer demonstrated hope, courage, commitment, control and resilience. They did not demonstrate negative reverberations from the-Novum of life-loss experienced. Reminiscence was a positive

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experience and their personal attributes were enhancing.

Based on the dominant pattern of life story style, participants, Jim, Ruth and Helen were Negaters. Jim was best characterized as trying to deal with a Novum of life-loss as best he could because of his responsibilities relating to his adult handicapped daughter. Jim's perceptions are that childhood was carefree and his reminiscences tried to draw sustenance from the past and tried to deal with present deprivations and losses. Jim did continue to cling to hope, "When I look back I can see how full my life was and reminiscing about those times helps me to remember that."

The findings indicated that less consistency of the previously described personal attributes were explicated from his reminiscences but these findings seem to be congruent with the Negating style and add to its description.

One of the prevailing characteristics in Helen's dominantly Negating pattern of life story presentation, was her attempt to distance herself from her Novum of life-loss. Helen kept busy to keep from reminiscing but admitted that she could not stop thoughts from

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coming to her. She tried not to dwell on them when that happens. Kart (1991) stated that this behavior has a defensive value and provides a safe distance between inner feelings, the image of the self, and external performance. Should something limit this defensive behavior, intensified feedback through memories may result in a breakthrough of intolerable anxiety. Helen seemed to be still struggling with returning thoughts and the frustration over the lack of control over her past life and the need to have to accept what fate dealt her, her husband's untimely death. She still experienced negative reverberations from the Novum of life-loss, anger, personal loss, and feelings of sadness and loneliness. For her, reminiscing was sadness and if it were possible, she never would.

Negating is a condition characterized by the absence of anything positive or affirmative (From, 1971). It is the pushing away of certain aspects of one's life that are less acceptable than others (Gelfand, 1988). Participants' designated to be Negaters did not reflect the consistent personal attributes explicated from the Affirmers narratives.

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These findings related to the Negaters support and expand Fallot's categories.

The participants who are Negaters may not want to reminisce, like Helen did, but if they do, an attentive listener may help and they may attain new or revised insight as a result (Birren, 1980). According to Butler (1976) listening may provide an opportunity to reevaluate, reinterpret and /or resolve past conflict-laden issues. Listening seemed helpful in some instances for Ruth and Helen who were Negaters.

The findings indicated that Sister Mary was the only participant demonstrating Fallot's Despairing life story style of presentation. Her narratives of the Novum of life-loss indicated that she received no support from her superior when her parents died, and none from the other sisters when her nephew was dying of AIDS. On the contrary, she was afraid of their reaction to this diagnosis. Over the years disturbing memories related to unresolved conflicts of her life-losses and life-state changes spontaneously returned and she re-experienced the sadness. Sister Mary's life story reflected her inability to link her inner feelings with her external role expectations (Oates, 1993). During her religious life she had no tangible

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support system, she turned inward to find meaning and spiritual guidance in a state of despair. But, despair rejects comfort (Oates, 1993). Her reminiscences were private and the reverberations from the-Novum continued to elicit sadness. When she shared her private reminiscences it served to unburden feelings of guilt and regret. Literature on reminiscence supports this finding as Butler contends that reminiscing has therapeutic value (1976).

Personal attributes were not discussed by Fallot. The findings indicated that certain attributes as hope, courage, control and resilience, were consistent in the participants who were Affirmers. Neugarten, Havighurst, and Tobin (1968, p. 56) asserted that the individual's personality does not change over time, rather there is "increasing consistency in traits observed and the characteristics central to the personality seem to become even more pronounced, and those values the individual clings to most, become even more important to them as they maintain continuity of self", having previously establishing their own identity during adolescence.

The findings indicated that Ruth, who was a Negater, did gain insight with increasing acceptance of

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her past in recent days and after reflecting on the direction of her life trajectory. Literature supports this behavior.

The Life Span Developmental view of personality stresses the importance of early impressions and life-long continuities in personality, but also supports Neugarten et al. (1968) that the unique qualities of adaption evidenced by older people and the special experiences and problems they encounter continue to shape the personality in later life (Gelfand, 1988).

The findings indicated that by viewing the life trajectory in retrospect and explicating the-Novum, an opportunity is provided to see the reverberating themes that have impacted on participants as well as their response, the here and now, and implications for the future. Marsh (1976, p. 43) provided support for these findings by concluding that the elderly express their identity through themes which are "rooted in personal experiences, particular structural factors, and a constellation of value orientations."

That life is unpredictable was reflected in the reminiscences of the participants and articulated by Jim. The desire to control one's own destiny influences all other human motives (Deci, 1976).

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Internal locus of control was distinguished from external locus of control. They are components of Fallot's categories identified in the reminiscences of all of the participants. Diverse coping styles were reflected by the participants' in their narrated life stories. Coping styles were not discussed by Fallot. Yet, coping styles seem central to the reminisced story styles of presentations he described. These findings have the potential to expand Fallot's description of categories.

The participants' narrated reminiscences generally reflected their consistent coping styles. Havighurst (1968) contended that characteristic coping strategies reflect one's personality and are in place long before the age of 65. Coping is a process, a strategy used to deal with stress (Lazarus, 1966). The aim of coping is mastery, control or resolution (Weisman & Worden, 1976). Coping styles can be divided into three categories of styles; approach, avoidance, and nonspecific defenders (Lazarus, 1966). These three styles seem to be congruent with Fallot's categories and may also be used to explain them. These findings indicate that coping styles need to be studied in order to expand Fallot's descriptions of categories.

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Individuals using the "approach" coping style are the most effective copers as they tackle the threat and possess characteristics of Fallot's Affirmers. It is the engagement with the risk that results in a "turning point" because of what happens then determines the direction of the trajectory for years to follow, and with implications for the person's ability to handle future crises (Selye, 1956; Insel & Moos, 1974; Moos, 1977).

Individuals who practice "avoidance" use strategies that distance themselves from the threat as do Fallot's Negaters. "Nonspecific defenders" are the least effective copers who remain neutral and passive in their response (Lazarus, 1966, p. 22). Coping styles are closely linked with personality and have the potential to expand the descriptions of Fallot's categories. According to the Life Span Developmentalist Framework, it is possible to have continued growth throughout the life span (Neugarten et al., 1968) and looking at personality variables that facilitate re-adaption is supported by Fallot.

The findings indicated that some participants, the Affirmers were usually able to achieve a satisfactory transition after a Novum. A consistent satisfactory

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transition after a Novum was not always apparent in Negaters or Despairers.

According to Feldman (1974), re-adaptation is coming to terms existentially with the reality of a change in state of being, discarding false hope and destructive hopelessness, restructuring the environment in which one must now function. This requires reorganization and acceptance of self in a different sense and may be the essence of the needed response after a Novum is experienced, as past experiences are "symbolically connected" with one another to have meaning for an individual (Neisser, 1978, p. 45).

The inconsistency making transitions after a Novum may account for the incongruent results related to reminiscing and adaption. The elderly may need to readapt after a Novum. Restructuring may allow the elderly to maintain a more realistic sense of unity about themselves and connectedness with the past they consider relevant to their present life. The nuances between adaptation and re-adaption need to be studied as they relate to reminiscence. The degree of success in resolution of life's conflicts and the coping mechanisms acquired over a life time will impact on the

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degree of acceptance one has of his or her life (Kart, 1991), and the meaning of reminiscences.

A Leaving of Legacies

The findings indicated that legacies can be conceptualized as the participants' contribution to succeeding generations. The roots of the participants' legacies were traced through their reminiscences. They were usually generated from a meaningful life episode.

A legacy is like a plant. Once nurtured from a seed, it grows, takes root and flowers bloom. Under the right conditions the seeds germinate and live with new growth and the process is generative, goes on and on until blighted. The participants' reminiscences revealed the legacies that either were bequeathed or generated.

The findings can be explained by Erickson as this theoretical category is linked with Erickson's seventh stage of development which addresses the generative functions of the individual. In the last stage, the individual reviews his or her life in order to determine the achievement of integrity. The elderly participants were in Erickson's stage of ego-integrity and their reminiscences identified the process used to leave legacies. Hess (1991) proposed that the leaving

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of legacies is a generative process as legacies are identified and shared best as one approaches the end of life. Marshall (1974) contended that the review of one's life which assists with the establishment of integrity is generative when it is conducted through reminiscing.

The findings indicated that participants' legacies varied widely. Helen's legacies identified with generational accomplishments. Alice left property. For Jim and Bob, it was values and May's was her long life. According to the literature reviewed, the major studies relating to legacies focused on the ways legacies are shared and defined. Legacies are seen to transcend time and mortality as Hess (1991, p. 729), determined that the "popularity of oral histories is a humanistic approach to immortality." He maintained that as long as the story is told, one remains alive in the minds of others.

Everyone has a life story: its meaning articulated through words. Every day we transcend time as we tell our thoughts to others and establish our immortality. Perhaps, this is one of the threats to the elderly who live alone. Besides the loneliness, there is the fear that no one else will know or remember them.

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The findings indicated additional ways that legacies can be left. According to literature findings on legacies, with the advance of technology, many families have videotapes and/or audiotapes of family members or friends to preserve memories (Hart, 1989). Alice articulated this in her reminiscences. Her children had taped their father speaking to them as a tribute to his wisdom. In the past, pictures, letters or autobiographies sufficed. Helen shared her mother's letters with her children. The findings indicated that the younger generation values these tangible or intangible legacies.

Hart (1987) used an interview guide to assist dying patients categorize and express their memories. The life story was taped and bequeathed to a designated person at the individual's request. These findings indicated the purposes collections of memories serve; to instruct, to entertain, to impart wisdom, and essentially to serve as connecting links with the past and future. Literature concerning legacies expressed through others (Houston, 1989), mentors (Ostrovski, 1979), property, assets and personal possessions, and living legacies (Ebersole, 1979) is congruent with study findings.

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The most popular work on legacies is The Foxfire books which are legacies of the living (Wigginton, 1972-1980). These collections of interviews of old people were conducted by highschool students to learn the survival skills of this older generation.

There was a general sharing of life stories with family members by the participants, for example, Bob often spoke of fun filled family get-togethers where stories were shared and Ruth shared stories about her past with her children. The findings indicated that legacies of the living occur through narrative and the storytelling form of reminiscence. The participants' legacies reflected what had become most meaningful in their lives over time. Literature findings explain this. The literature on legacies indicates that each person is a link in the chain of generations and as such, legacies may identify with generational accomplishments (Erickson, 1963), or it may be a symbol of the bequeather's everlastingness, their endowment to humanity.

A Making of Spiritual Links

The findings of this study indicated that the participants' spiritual expression was often woven into their narrated reminiscences. Spirituality is a

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dimension of humans. May, Helen and Ruth and Vera referred to the spiritual dimension in their lives in the course of their storytelling. Sister Mary, Jim, Alice and Bob were more focused on aspects of their spirituality as it seemed to have special importance for them, and the roots of spirituality can be traced to early childhood.

Spirituality as a concept throughout the life span is a recent focus of nursing research, although spiritual integrity has long been identified as an intrinsic human need (O'Brien, 1982). Literature provides many interpretations of the dimensions of spirituality defining them as a principle, an experience, a way of being, a mystery, and a God experience (Barashinger, 1979; Colliton, 1981; Egan, 1984; Kenner, Guzzetta, & Dossey, 1985; May, 1985). The dimensions of spirituality in the participants were congruent with those expressed in the literature.

Several participants had strong church connections and engaged in ministering missions. According to the literature on spirituality, individuals use religion to meet their spiritual needs through its "beliefs, and communal experiences" (Hess, 1991). Crandall (1980) studied the positive value that religion and church

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activities have on the lives of elderly individuals. Psychological church support takes the form of relief when facing illness and death, finding and maintaining meaning in life, accepting loss related to decline, and realizing the value they still have to contribute to the community. Religious affiliation provides social functions that promote positive interpersonal relationships and support at a time when the social worlds of the elderly are shrinking. Involvement in ministry draws the individual's attention away from themselves and to the problems and concerns of others. They can assume an active role in related activities. Crandall (1980) observed that religious belief, prayer, and faith in God enable elderly individuals to overcome some of the common problems of aging, specifically, "loneliness, grief and unhappiness". The participants assumed various roles within their church affiliation. Sister Mary and Helen worked with the homebound, Jim assumed a lay leadership role and other ministering missions.

An individual's spirituality is described as the sense of personhood for what one is and what they are becoming, the core of one's being. One's spirituality is the dichotomy of life as it is the intangible domain

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in which the indelible mark left by the Novum resides, and from which any reverberations emanate. The church was a positive Novum for Bob. He strongly believed that it was a positive influence in his life and he wanted the same for his son. The theme of church connections was significant in his reminiscences.

The attributes of spirituality explicated from the reminiscences of the participants' seemed to lead one toward the Affirming style described by Fallot (1976). Crandall argued that a great deal can be learned from the religious beliefs one espouses as it not only tends to shape an individual's attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and values, but also provides a framework to know how one interprets life events. According to the participants in this study, church connections and religious beliefs played a significant role during their life span. Positive personal attributes were reflected in the participants' spiritual dimension in varying degrees.

An individual's spirituality includes the metaphysical; the motivation and commitment in the path of positive values for life, which include meaning and hope. Hope, previously discussed is also intrinsic to the concept of spirituality. Included in this

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definition of spirituality is trust both in relationships with others and with God which provide the foundation for meaning (Stoll, 1989). A limitation of the sample of this study is religiosity due to the consistent practice of their faith.

In summary: The findings indicated that when reminiscences were narrated in a story-telling style of presentation it provided the medium for examining the life story trajectory. The narrative framework provided access to the lived experiences of individuals. The-novum, legacies and spirituality were meaningful in the participants' reminiscences. The findings support the need for additional knowledge related to the practice of leaving legacies since it has been addressed infrequently in nursing studies. The narrative, with a story telling style of reminiscence, formed the base for understanding the phenomenon. The findings support continued research to develop the style and categories described in order to expand what we know.

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CHAPTER V
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS,
IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

This qualitative study was undertaken to expand our understanding of the meaning of reminiscence. The findings provided a description of the meaning of reminiscence for a white, educated, economically stable group of individuals, over the age of 65, who are considered well elderly, have age related changes, and live in the community. These findings are specific to this group and are not generalizable to any other population.

As the population of individuals over the age of 65 is increasing and more of them are considered well elderly, it seemed important to understand the meaning of reminiscence now considered a normal developmental aspect of aging. The existing literature on reminiscence focused on the process, styles, and outcomes of this practice, its relationship to adaptation, and to the degrees of ego-integrity achieved. The findings of this study support some research findings related to reminiscence, add

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knowledge for our understanding of this phenomenon and refute others.

In reminiscence, the reflection is holographic. The self is seen as an entity of life experiences. Meaning is attached to the reminiscence based on how the past is assimilated. In this study the participants narrated their reminiscences in a storytelling style of presentation. Reminiscences were used to explicate participants' life story trajectories. The findings indicated that the narratives provided a glimpse of the fabric of the participants' lives which included their Novum, their legacies and their spirituality in theoretical categories that were all interrelated and contributed to understanding the meaning of reminiscence.

The theoretical links between categories emerged as an effect of the narrated nature of the data collected, and their interrelatedness is supported. Choice is inherent in each of the categories. The personal attribute hope and the leaving of legacies and spirituality connote a connectedness throughout the life span and beyond, have generative capacities, and rely on narrative for actualization.

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The participants' story styles of presentation were used to validate Fallo's (1976) descriptions of Affirmers, Negaters, and Despairers. The participants' life trajectories reflected all of the types described. These findings suggested that the participants' differed widely in the extent to which their past was assimilated in an accepting way. The Affirmers were positive about their past and their reminiscences were satisfying. Attributes of the Affirmer were congruent with the needed requisites for the achievement of ego-integrity and adaptation. These findings may add to the descriptions of Fallo's categories.

The Negaters distanced themselves from past painful events. Their reminiscences elicited hurt. The benefits from their engaging in this practice could be questioned. If the Negaters did want to reminisce, an attentive listener might help. Reminiscence is the tool used for reflecting on one's past as a search for meaning according to Rapaport (1972). New meaning may be assigned to the past event and /or a new insight may result (Husserl, 1964). The findings indicated that reminiscence helped the participant who was a Despairer to unburden her feelings of guilt and regret.

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The findings indicated that narratives related to the-Novum of life-loss comprised the largest category. This finding is not supported in reminiscence literature as Kowolski et al. (1971) concluded that more memories recalled were related to positive themes and pleasing experiences. This may be explained by the serious attitude taken by the participants toward the interview that did not lend itself to a social or entertaining atmosphere. The participants did verbalize their enjoyment of reminiscing with family and friends.

The findings indicated that when a Novum was experienced, as a point on life's trajectory, inner resources were activated as some degree of transition was required. The degree of transition achieved impacted on the magnitude of reverberations that ensued and on subsequent resolution and acceptance over time. This outcome determined the meaning of the reminiscence for the participants. These findings are supported by related literature (Butler, 1980; Erickson, 1976).

The study supported the importance of the interaction of personal attributes and coping style for adaption and/ or re-adaptation and achievement of ego-integrity in the participants. Fallot did not address

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personal attributes or coping styles. The findings indicated that certain personal attributes and coping styles may be used to expand Fallot's descriptions of categories. This may contribute to the development of a life story construct.

The study findings indicated that participants' left legacies based on what was had become meaningful in their lives over time suggesting that elderly participants had an intrinsic need to make a contribution to humanity. Literature on legacies is sparse and few nursing studies have addressed this area.

The study findings indicated that spirituality was personally meaningful for all participants. Ministering missions promoted a sense of connectedness. The implications of spirituality in the lives of the elderly was addressed comprehensively in literature and in literature related to reminiscence. This finding may be explained as a characteristic of the study sample and this finding cannot be generalized.

Implications for Nursing

Nurses have always cared for the elderly but they are doing so more today because as the population of older individuals increases, so does their consumption

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of health care services. Concurrent with these changes is the continued transition from institution-based care to community care. The scope of nursing continues to include responsibilities for making independent nursing assessments to meet client's needs.

The needs of the elderly differ from those of younger people, and an emphasis must be placed on developmental aspects of aging by nursing. For example, the elderly often talk about their past readily in conversations relating stories about their lives. Their story style of presentation reveals a great deal about them. The nurse should use this natural resource.

According to the study findings, the participants' story styles of presentation validated Fallot's (1976) classification of story styles of presentation. These findings are significant for nurses who care for the elderly in diverse practice settings. Fallot's classification can be applied to a client's story style as characteristics of the categories can be identified. During the course of delivering care to a client the specific story style characteristics that can be identified may provide clues to one's individual needs.

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Locus of control which is central to Fallot's categories, is an important variable for nurses to understand. Although locus of control can be identified easily, reminiscing adds a dimension of the life story narrative which can provide hidden meaningful themes that can be a valuable source of information. Knowing the client's locus of control tendency enables the nurse to anticipate how independent a client will seek to become. The nurse may understand how anxiety provoking the situational powerlessness will be for certain clients. Individuals with internal locus of control may have more anxiety in powerlessness situations than individuals with external locus of control. This is especially important for the elderly living at home. Illness may be devastating as they are required to relinquish their control even if it is only temporary.

These findings can lead to the development of an appropriate plan of care. For example, individuals tending toward an internal locus of control use approach and direct confrontation strategies while individuals with an external locus of control use withdrawal, hostility, and aggression (Anderson, 1977). The nurse can have a more holistic approach to the

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client by understanding of the client's locus of control tendencies. Even though quantitative measures are not practical in the day-to-day practice setting, the nurse can use observational skills to note behavioral indices of locus of control tendencies (Wallston & Wallston, 1978).

The study findings indicated an internal locus of control was characteristic of the Affirmers and that certain personal attributes and coping styles were identified in the narratives. The study findings identified personal attributes; hope, courage, control, commitment and resilience, that tended to lead an individual to the Affirming style.

The usual purpose of the nursing assessment in all settings is to identify patterns of functioning that deviate from the individual's baseline, or from accepted norms of behavior for that age group so timely interventions may begin. The data collected in a life story form may serve several functions. The narrative framework provides the nurse direct information about the human experience. There is also increasing evidence pointing to the cumulative effects of life style in the etiology of many types of dysfunction that may be diagnosed.

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The identification of causative etiologies due to individual tendencies, helps to determine whether certain changes are the result of the aging process or disease processes. The view that health promotion comes too late for people over 65 is changing. People of all ages benefit from change in life style.

When interacting with clients and listening to their narrated life stories nurses take advantage of this natural tendency for data collection. Nurses must use their strong communication techniques so that these life stories do not dominate the purpose of the assessment interview but blend with it. Structured questions facilitate appropriate shifts in the conversation. For example, after learning about physical complaints, the nurse needs to know the clients' sources of strength.

In this population it may come from spiritual links as the findings indicated as aging persons look beyond self to find meaning and order in their lives. Fears of death may also be resolved. By shifting the discussion from physical needs to the client's spiritual needs in the conversation, the client may disclose what was meaningful. With this understanding the nurse can help meet client needs.

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Other positive interactions between the nurse and client may occur when an elderly person notices that his memories are valued. An empathetic communication process begins (Ebersole, 1976). The significant finding for nurses to note is that this form of reminiscence is a connection. The attentive listener enables the reminiscer to articulate his or her feelings and perhaps to gain new or expanded insight.

The findings of the study indicated that participants seemed to have an innate desire to make a contribution to humanity by leaving a legacy. Types of legacies varied and can be as simple as telling stories about the past. The bequest of a legacy may promote a sense of everlastingness and transcendence. The nurse ministering to a client during his final moments of life should understand this need as he or she may be responsible for carrying out such a request.

Gerontological nurses are continually seeking to develop frameworks that suggest that older individuals retain their capacity to construct and share meanings and to control their own lives. By utilizing the natural tendency of the elderly to reminiscence during conversations and by listening carefully to their narrated life stories in their everyday practice,

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gerontological nurses have a vantage point for determining what is meaningful in the life of a client and why and use that knowledge to provide more meaningful care.

Recommendations for Further Research

Adult development and aging are complex processes that we are far from understanding. Much of what we know about adult development and aging is description. We have few explanations for why or how certain phenomena occur. The studies that have been conducted on reminiscence are no exception. Although previous studies have provided a theoretical base for the study of reminiscence, their experimental and correlational approaches greatly oversimplified this practice and findings have been inconclusive.

Reminiscences are autobiographical memories. Reviewing research findings on memory provided a new approach to the study of reminiscence and expanded our understanding of the phenomenon.

It is recommended that additional studies of autobiographical memories be conducted in order to continue to expand our understanding of this complex process.

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The findings indicated that the participants' reminisced life story styles of presentation validated the categories described by Fallot (1976) who used a quantitative approach. Fallot's categories identified the content and structural aspects of the life story style of presentation. The storied nature of human interpretation is the center of the analysis.

This method of analysis is recommended by Sandelowski (1991, p. 162) "for understanding human beings as subjects of nursing inquiry". Knowing and understanding is the goal of qualitative research.

The findings of the study indicated that the participants narrated their life stories in their reminiscences. The desire to narrate is inherent in human nature, to tell what has moved us deeply (White, 1980). Narratives provided the story fabric. The participants' narratives described the-Novum, specific meaningful life episodes, identified personal inner forces that either promoted transition or not and explicated the reverberations that occurred. The narratives indicated how the past was assimilated in an accepting and appropriating way which impacted on the meaning of the reminiscences.

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It is recommended that the meaning of reminiscence may be expanded by conducting research that focuses on the course of personality development to answer questions such as: How does personality impact on what is remembered? How does coping impact on what is remembered? What personal attributes lead one toward an Affirming style? How do memories of the past relate to present needs and wants? How are experiences endowed with meaning? Knowing this may help to provide some of the answers related to the phenomenon of reminiscence.

Personal attributes and coping styles supported the Affirming story style of presentation and may add to the descriptions of Fallot's categories. Additional research studies using large samples needs to be conducted to validate these findings.

It is recommended that research be conducted to develop more complete descriptions of Fallot's (1976) categories of story styles of presentation necessary for the development of a life story construct.

Sociologists, anthropologists, and gerontologists have all been intrigued with aspects of phenomena such as reminiscence, the meanings of life and death,

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sources of strength, and coping mechanisms, beginnings, endings, and reason for being.

It is recommended that in order to understand the phenomenon of reminiscence in the elderly, more multidisciplinary longitudinal and sequential research be undertaken.

Throughout the participants narrated life story was a consistent references to various types of legacies. They were determined to be meaningful from the participants reminiscences and should be studied qualitatively using a narrative approach.

Although numerous studies on spirituality have been conducted, few researchers have used a qualitative approach with this population. It is recommended that research be conducted to expand our understanding of the relationship between legacies, spirituality and reminiscence for the elderly.

Naturalistic inquiry using the qualitative approach assumes that human behavior is the result of complex forces that must be studied in its natural environment. Qualitative research studies on reminiscence using the grounded theory and a narrative approach to the life story may expand our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

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Appendix A
Participants' Consent Form

I, _____ give my permission to be interviewed by Roberta Cavendish for the purpose of nursing research. I understand that the results of this research will be reported in such a way that individual identification will be kept confidential. I understand that the purpose of this research is to understand the meaning a well elderly individual gives to the experience of reminiscing. I give my consent for the researcher to record and transcribe the interview sessions.

I understand that Mrs. Cavendish will interview me at my own home or a place of mutual convenience for two or more sessions lasting about one hour each. I may choose not to discuss any questions I don't wish to discuss and I may terminate my participation at any time.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix B

Demographic Data Sheet

Name _____ Code Number _____

Age of Informant _____

Sex M _____ F _____

Marital Status S _____ M _____ D _____ W _____

Education Elementary _____
Secondary _____
College _____
Graduate _____

Residence Private house _____
Apartment building _____
Other _____

Members in current household
Unmarried Daughters _____
Married Daughters _____
Daughter-in-law _____
Unmarried Sons _____
Married Sons _____
Son-in-law _____
Unmarried son(s) _____
Grandchildren _____
Others _____

Informant's Roles and functions in the household

Cooking _____
Laundry _____
Cleaning _____
Babysitter for grandchildren _____
Food shopping _____
Other _____

Employment outside the home Yes _____ No _____

Type of work _____ number of hours _____

Appendix C

Interview Probes

1. What does the term reminiscing mean to you?
2. Do you ever reminisce?
3. Do you like to reminisce?
4. How often do you reminisce?
5. Are there times of the year you reminisce more than others i.e. holidays, anniversary of deaths?
6. What gets you to start reminiscing?
7. What do you reminisce about?
8. Is there an event or thing you reminisce about more than anything else?
9. With whom do you reminisce?
10. Do you reminisce with any of your family members?
11. With whom do you most enjoy reminiscing?
12. What is it about a person that encourages you to reminisce?
13. What happens when you reminisce?
14. What is it like to reminisce?
15. Are you aware of any particular feeling you experience when you do reminisce or afterwards?
16. What other feelings do you have when you reminisce?
17. Do you think reminiscing affects the way you feel about things?
18. Do you think your life is better because you reminisce?